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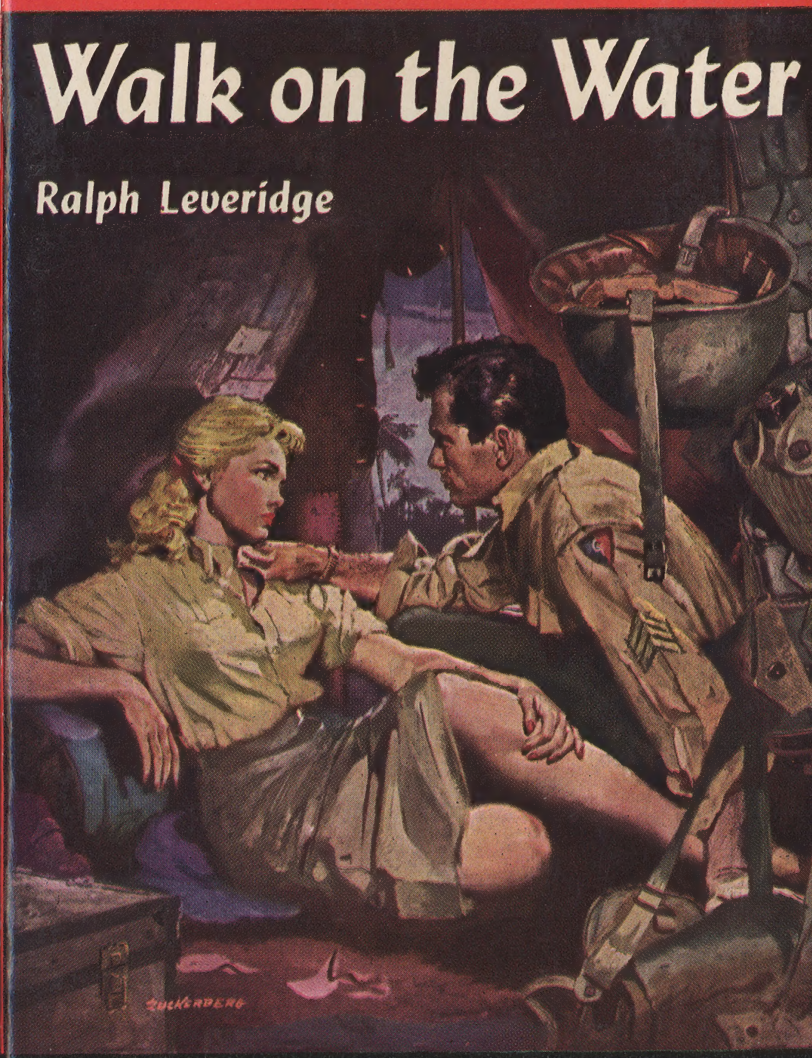
A Brutal Novel of Men and Women in War

Walk on the Water

Ralph Leveridge



A SIGNET BOOK

Complete and Unabridged

"Now he looked at her, his eyes traveling up and down her body. As used to the stares of men as she was, Norah felt she had never known so intense or complete a scrutiny . . . He seemed to be searching. For what? She suddenly wondered. Strength or weakness?"

Love and Death

Norah Calhoon met Sergeant Hervey when he was hospitalized behind the lines. She feared, and yet was irresistibly attracted to his overpowering masculinity, and in a few wonderful weeks they packed the emotions and intensities of a lifetime.

But when Hervey's wounds healed, he chose to return to the lurking death and filth of the Pacific jungles to rejoin his squad because of his loyalty to his men. To all the men—the cowards, the heroes, the brutes, the weaklings—the men who had died and the men who were still living and depended on him for leadership.

This is a stinging picture of war at its rawest, a book whose tragic pity and understanding creates an unforgettable picture of men and women at their worst and best.

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WALK On The WATER

By Ralph Leveridge

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I say móre: the just man justices;
Kéeps gráce: thát keeps all his goings graces:
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

From the *Poems* of Gerard Manley Hopkins,
COURTESY OF THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

TO the woman of Sherwood Forest
and to the woman of Charlottesville

BOOK ONE

1

IT had not stopped raining for a week, except for brief intervals. Sometimes it was a furious downpour, the rain-spots stinging their hands and faces, as hail will sting. Sometimes it was a soft, multitudinous drizzle, a morning mist of rain. But always it was there, a relentless thing. At last it seemed that its roar was a liquid poured into their eardrums, pressing against the membranes, tightening the hard sense of suffocation within their hearts, building a scream that somehow was never released. Their uniforms were like wet dishrags, slopped around their bodies; and as they paced, revolvingly, the tiny confines of their foxholes, these soggy clothes washed them. And they did not want to be washed. They wanted to stay dirty, for in dirt there was a comfort. Dirt was allied to what they were going through. Cleanliness was something foreign now; something belonging to the lost America of fresh white sheets and newly laundered underwear, of summer cotton and red lips and pink breasts, something tormenting when known beside the now habitual filth, mud, stale blood and dead rotting bodies. So they wanted dirt. They had to have dirt—as their beards and itching scalps and sweating feet suggested dirt. Instead, there was the monsoon, and soggy clothes insidiously cleaning their bodies to leprosy white. Because of this they raved and, raising their tired eyes to the clouds, their fists clenched and tears in their voices, groaned aloud.

But still the rain poured down. If anything, it mocked the blasphemy that was the GI prayer. First it was a roar, then a soft murmur, as irregular in sound as the China Sea beating on the shore. It was hot and, despite the impetuous wind, heavy with humidity. Cailini had said, before falling into a dream-filled sleep, that it was like swimming in an already dead sea. Hervey, his buddy and foxhole partner, heard but did not reply. The full tiredness that shrouded him would not even let him nod an appreciation. But the moment he heard Cailini's soft snore, he turned swiftly. The sight of Cailini sleeping

was almost more than he could bear. He lifted his foot and was about to kick the sleeping man when he saw Cailini's arms suddenly, uncontrollably, jerk. Hervey stopped then and, looking down at the tired, war-dissipated face, felt a fierce onrush of tenderness. His hand reached out, and he stroked Cailini's forehead lightly, as if he hoped to wipe away his friend's dream. He knew, watching Cailini, reality had pursued him into sleep. There was no escape from the nightmare.

After a minute he forgot Cailini and leaned against the rear wall of the foxhole. With his fingers and palms Hervey began slowly to massage his own face. He had never been more tired and, strangely, never more awake. With his fingers he pressed his stinging eyes deep into their sockets. He ran his hands over the puffy bags under his eyes. Carefully he explored the mouth-line tangents, the crow's-feet and forehead wrinkles. His sudden vanity swore they were as deep as scars. He wondered how war-old his face really was. Suddenly impatient with himself, he shouted aloud, "Who the hell gives a shit?" His answer came ringing back, "You do! You do!" And what was really he, said, "Well, there's not a goddamn thing you can do about it."

A sound ahead of him stopped his brooding. Swiftly he peered through the camouflage, but there was nothing in No Man's Land or beyond to betray the existence of Japs. All that could be seen were masses of thick, opulent vegetation, greener than any emerald; stumpy incongruous banana trees; closely knitted bamboo clumps and lanes of stately coconut trees that looked like cathedral naves. Thick, juicy mud was everywhere, a deep and tenacious gum upon the earth. It was caked on the squad's clothes; it clogged their weapons, reducing the efficiency of high-speed fire. Especially was it concentrated in the foxholes, which were not so much holes as depressions punched by a giant fist in the soggy terrain.

Hervey began to raise himself, taking care that his head did not appear above the camouflage. He looked to the right. The neighboring foxhole was empty. Even the bloodstains that earlier had been splashes of red on the brown and the greens were gone now. Hervey wanted to call out, to shout Gruber's name, for he still had a feeling that the boy was somewhere in the foxhole. In his mind there persisted a picture of Gruber, alive, sleeping and hidden from sight—a far more vivid picture than the finality of a bursting mortar shell and Gruber's limbs flying up, out, around. It took Hervey almost a minute to remember, and then the sensation he was growing to know more and more closed over him again. It was as though his body were ice, and that ice on fire. In the startling silence that had

followed the explosion, Rosinski, his eyes dilated and his Adonis face stretched tight against his bones, had shouted, "They got Gruber!" Adams had muttered a tired, "That's bad." Nothing more. Lunagan, who had winced involuntarily, listened to his partner, Tuthill, voice a laconic, "Tough! But what the hell does Rosinski expect us to do about it?" Polson, the big farmer, said three times that it was an awful thing, but five minutes later his mind was back in Ohio, speculating on the current bean crop. Hervey himself had raised his fist in the enemy's direction, shaken it savagely, shouted every obscenity he could think of and then, as abruptly, had shut up.

Wearily he had turned to Cailini. "What's the use? What's the goddam use?"

Cailini nodded his head. There was nothing to say. Hervey had said it all.

Bill Hervey now stared hard at the empty hole, but as hard as he stared he could see none of the brilliant red that an hour before had marked the brown and the greens.

He moved restlessly, briefly folded his arms, felt the sergeant stripes against his sopping uniform. He thought of his mother, or, as he called her, Emmy. He remembered her crisp humor, her concern because he drank too much Scotch and would not get a job, marry and settle down as so many of his friends had. He remembered the nights he had lain on her bed and talked until dawn. He wished he were on that bed now. Then he remembered his father—the Senator, Bill and Emmy called him. Though he was actually a senator, the title was infused with a hundred private mocking connotations.

The Senator was a showman and a pompous ass, listening to and in love with each rhetorical spiel he made. Words. Rivers of words that became oceans the moment he opened his mouth. And when the press glowed, Emmy and Bill, looking quietly at each other, said nothing, but grew to understand each other more.

He often thought about his mother, and then his fear was like the big dip on a roller coaster. These were the only times he was filled with panic, the times when he was sure she would never see him again. Now, on looking back, he knew she could not live when the hope of reunion was gone. It would have been different if the Senator had been a lover, or a man. Instead, he was something attached through a ceremony, something irrevocably hers (or she his) because they had made a mistake, and the scheme and pattern of their lives said there must be no repairing. He, Bill, her one child, had taken the place of a lover. He had eased her loneliness, mostly by being

himself. So much had been shared between them that all she needed was to know he lived.

Hervey winced. Poor Emmy. He wished she would die, right now, before he died, and then it would all be over—her never really having had a man.

He started to stare at the sky, saw that it was beginning to get darker. The formidable clouds seemed to expand, now pouring their gloom over the earth.

He nudged Cailini. "Wake up!"

The man grunted but did not open his eyes.

Hervey shook him. "Wake up, I said. Come on, wake up!"

"Christ Almighty!" Cailini opened his eyes, breathed deeply, then painfully heaved himself into an upright position. "Okay," he said, "I'm awake."

"All right. Stay awake."

Cailini stretched, yawned so hard it brought tears to his eyes. "Hell," he said. It was more of a statement of fact than an exclamation. "What's up?" He turned an inquiring face to Hervey.

"Nothing. I just wanted you to wake up."

Cailini considered this, looking around the foxhole as he did so, seeing the mud and feeling it cold against his limbs. Suddenly he spat vehemently, "Isn't this goddam war ever going to end?"

Hervey laughed. "You've said that every time you've waked since basic training."

"I don't give a damn. I'm sick and tired of this shit."

A touch of malice crept over Hervey's lined face. "But just think how much experience all this is, buddy! And you're getting it free. Why, the Army is even paying you for it."

"Drop dead!"

"For you, who wants to write, it's invaluable."

"Go to hell!"

"It will mature your soul, bestow upon you a limitless profundity. You might even win the Nobel Prize."

"And if you don't shut up, you might win a bloody nose."

"But think how the critics will hail you now: Experience learned at the core of living. Vital. Incisive—"

"Go take a flying——"

"And you would deny yourself this! What's wrong with you? Were you spawned of mice or men?"

"Spawned the same way you were. By a man and woman. They were together—"

"I should hope so."

"—in bed."

"How do you know they were in bed?"

Startled, Cailini asked, "Huh?"

"Maybe they were standing up. Maybe they were taking a bath."

Then, because Hervey's laughter was infectious, Cailini began to laugh with him. Between the hilarious surging spasms, he gasped, "You son of a bitch! You goddam son of a bitch!"

When it was over, they looked at each other sheepishly. Not because they had laughed, but because they had laughed so hard.

"You know something?" Hervey warned.

"What?"

"We're both getting punchy."

Fear was in their eyes. Quietly Cailini said, "That's bad."

Hervey nodded. "We'll have to be careful."

"The whole squad's that way."

"Yeah."

2

CAILINI stretched his long, thin legs, looked in vain for a position of comfort in the confined space. His knees were cramped, and his body, weak from the lack of exercise, ached all over. Savagely he kicked the forward wall and shouted, "Jesus H. Christ!"

"What's up now?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Just that I'm about to go stark raving mad." And again he kicked the wall. "You know something?" he asked Hervey. "I swear I'd rather be in hell."

Hervey too looked around. "Take it easy," he said. "You'll get there soon enough."

"After this, it will be heaven."

Hervey averted his face. His voice became quiet. "Well, whatever it is, it won't be lonely."

Cailini did not reply. He could not. He knew that Hervey's mind was reaching back, from the Gruber incident of today into the past and over the campaigns that were now history. Half the sergeant's original squad had gone, and many of their replacements. Dubois, Gehrman, Spinnato, Goldberg, Espedahl, Slingluff. All gone. As Cailini had once written in a poem, *Into the last corridor of the final taps.* Now he winced at this sentimentality.

Slyly Cailini looked at Hervey, saw the deep lines that creased his face. Hervey's expression was brooding, almost

sullen. Cailini moved, a small movement of discomfort. He always became uncomfortable when Hervey looked like this. Then the sergeant smiled. The transition was so swift, it was incongruous.

"Laughing away your conscience, Sarge?"

Hervey turned a bland face. "Conscience? What's that? Some new laxative?"

Cailini was delighted. "Hey, that's pretty good."

A pantomime of a grin tucked the corners of Hervey's lips, but there was no mirth there now.

"Come on," Cailini insisted. "What *were* you smiling at?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just—well, it's my birthday today."

"Your birthday! Jesus, man, who in hell thinks of birthdays any more?" He raised his voice and shouted toward the other foxholes. "Hey! The Sarge's got a birthday!"

There was a brief pause, then, from either side and from behind, the voices rose and swelled to a chorus—rusty voices, throaty voices, bronchial voices, and even a couple of good ones. Probably for the first time the jungle heard:

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, dear Sergeant,
Happy birthday to you.

The racket went on endlessly. It was the best diversion in days, and the whole squad joined in, shouting from foxhole to foxhole. They babbled incoherently, eager to share, to warm themselves before the sudden fire of camaraderie.

"Where're the cigars?"

"Yeah! Where're the cigars?"

Hervey shouted, "Same place as the birthday cake."

"How old are you, Sarge? Sweet sixteen?"

He yelled back, "Twenty-eight."

A concerted groan met his announcement. Almost to a man they shouted, "Hiya, Grandpa!"

Somebody called, "Say, fellows, how many bastards can you have by the time you hit twenty-eight?"

They roared again at that.

"How many you got, Sarge?"

"Nine."

Startled, they looked at each other. "Nine?" They did not believe it but they wanted to. What other squad could boast such a sergeant? "You're kidding!"

"Hell, no!"

Suspicion and hope were in their voices. "Where are they?"

"Right here!"

"Here? On the island?" A pause, then, "Say, what kind of a job are you handing us?"

Hervey yelled back, "My squad! My nine bastard squad members! Who the hell do you think?"

They liked that, and shouted, "At your age! Don't give us that. Why you were fresh out of juice twenty years before we were thought of."

"Listen, you junior-high adolescents, any time you want to prove that—!"

"Get him! Did you hear that? Ain't he the one to talk? Twenty-eight and nothing to show for it! Get a load of the big mouth!"

"If talk were sex, Hervey would be the next generation of America."

"What do you do with your time, Sarge? Read books? Ride the ferry?"

"Maybe he don't know about sex yet. Maybe nobody told him about the birds and the bees."

"Calls himself a man! Get that bulldozer up here before we choke on the stuff!"

"It's unAmerican! Twenty-eight and nothing to show for it."

They laughed uproariously, but one man observed, "Well, it's a bastard life, it's a bastard war, it's a bastard day; I'm bastard well fed-up, and if I weren't a bastard I don't know how the bastard hell I could bastard well take it."

Cheers met this tender philosophy. "Hello, Benjamin Franklin. Glad to meet you!"

"Sarge," shouted Zoole.

"What?"

"You gonna throw a party?"

"Oh, sure. Why not? We'll ask the Japs to stop shooting for a while. Sure, they'll be only too happy to oblige. Then we'll send word down the line and request some of the General's liquor. Nothing would delight the Profile more than to bring it up here himself."

Zoole blushed. "Aw, Sarge! I mean when we get back to bivouac!"

Contrite, Hervey assured him, "Sure, sure, Zoole. We'll throw a party that will rock this goddam island."

Eagerly Zoole asked, "We'll get plastered?"

"If we can swipe enough alky we will."

"Swell." That came from his heart. "Swell."

To Polson, his foxhole buddy, Zoole said, "We'll get plastered. Sarge'll get the alky. He can always get alky. And we'll get plastered." He grabbed Polson's arms. "We'll forget all this

shit then. We'll forget it when we get plastered." He danced. "I can hardly wait."

His buddy pushed him away. "Take it easy. Don't get so excited. It may be weeks before we get relieved."

Dismay spread over Zoole's young face. "You think so? You really think so?"

Polson moved uneasily, sorry he had spoken. "Well," he said, attempting a retreat, "you can't ever tell. Who knows, maybe we'll be withdrawn tomorrow. Let's hope so."

Fervently Zoole echoed him. "Yeah. Let's hope so."

3

CAILINI lifted a foot, watched the mud drip like syrup back into the deep water. He then replaced that foot and lifted the other.

Hervey looked at him, disgusted. "When will you learn," he said, "that there is no position of comfort here?"

"Marie Curie worked all her life to discover radium. I've been at this only two years."

Sadly Hervey surveyed Cailini's gangling body. "You look like a snake trying to screw itself."

"I don't give a goddam what I look like. I'm not posing for an ad."

"Listen, you fugitive from a shadow, the only thing you could pose for—"

"I know. I've heard it a thousand times before. You don't have to tell me." Suddenly he looked mysterious. "Anyway, one of these days I'm going to find that position and then—"

"And then you'll be able to pose for another kind of picture, only you won't ever be able to mail it. They have a law against that kind of photograph."

"—and then I'll be the hero of the Pacific. I'll be sent home. I'll get the Medal of Honor. You'll be sorry then, because you'll still be here, still fighting, still wallowing in mud and crap."

"Do I look worried?"

"I'm much too kind to tell you how you look." Now Cailini stopped raising his feet. He sighed deeply. "You know," he said, "I have a suspicion that I'm not going to find that position, not until the war's over, until I'm home and in bed with some cute little gal, her legs all wrapped around me, and me staring fondly at the sheets."

Hervey's face creased in a sudden grin. "You know, sometimes I think you've been touched with genius."

"Say, you're getting real intelligent in your old age."

"It's probably just the politician in me coming out."

Cailini fell silent. Then, suddenly, he said, "You know, it is too bad."

"What's too bad?"

"Like Zoole said. That we can't have a party. I sure could use a drink now."

"Don't tell me you're getting a taste for that rotten alky."

"It's not so bad when you mix it with fruit juice. And anything for a glow."

"Maybe we can have a little party."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got something."

"You have?"

"Sure."

"Well don't be so goddam mysterious. What is it? Something good?"

"You can say that again."

"For Christ's sake! What is it?"

"Guess."

"Say, what's gotten into you?"

"Come on! Quit your stalling! What have I got?"

"Hell, man, I don't know."

Hervey slapped him on the back. "It will gladden your black Wop heart, Cailini."

"Cigars?"

"Sure, I've got cigars. A box. But this is something else. Better than cigars."

"Candy?"

Hervey looked pityingly at his buddy. "Since when did candy become something to get excited about?"

Hope and incredulity dawned in Cailini's face. "Not—Aw, no!— You couldn't."

"What?"

Tentatively, with ill-concealed eagerness, he whispered, "Liquor?"

Hervey laughed. "Old friend, you get the sixty-four silver dollars."

"Oh, no!" Amazement and disbelief and joy were in Cailini's voice.

"Oh, yes. And here," he made an elaborate gesture, "comes the *pièce de résistance* of World War II." From his pack he extracted a loaf of bread, tore it open and exposed the bottle.

There was reverence in Cailini's tone. "Scotch!" he looked

at Hervey. "Let me hold it." He cradled the bottle in his arms, kissed it, spoke to it adoringly. "You precious, honey, doll baby! Oh, I love you!" Of Hervey he inquired, "Where'd you get this?"

"I got it two weeks ago. Been saving it ever since. Emmy sent it."

"Your mother?"

"Yes."

"Bless her heart." Then he asked, "what are you going to do with it? Open it now?" adding a fervent, "I hope."

"We should really pass it around the squad."

"You're crazy, man! One crock between twelve guys? How much do you think they'd get? And, hell, there'd be nothing left for us."

"There aren't twelve any more."

"That's right too. But—"

"Gruber went today. Gregory last—Friday, wasn't it?"

"I guess so."

"I'm sure it was Friday."

Cailini shrugged. "He went."

"Yeah."

"And that son-of-a-bitch Curtis shot his own leg."

Hervey said, "He told me it happened when he crawled over to me. Said a sniper got him."

"That's what he said."

"Well," the sergeant shook his head, "he's out of it now. Maybe they'll evacuate him to the States; maybe not. Either way, squad gossip won't bring him back. That leaves nine."

"And neither Lunagan nor Adams drinks. So—"

"Five and us. And one quart of Scotch."

"Yeah," said Cailini, sadly. "Five and us." Reluctantly he surrendered the bottle. Then, as an idea hit him, he implored, "Look! Give the squad the cigars. That's a solution. We'll keep the bottle."

"You know, it does hurt to pass that bottle around."

"Hurt! It's tearing my heart out."

"But they'd do the same for us."

"Some of them *might*."

"All of them. They're a damn good bunch."

"Okay, pass it around."

"Fine. I'll take off then and make the round. But let's have a shot first. You know, just in case."

"Just in case of what?"

Hervey grinned maliciously. "Just in case there isn't any left when I get back."

Alarm spread over Cailini's face. "By Jesus, there'd better be some left. You watch the bastards. You do the tilting."

After they had drunk, Cailini said, "You know what that tastes like?"

"I sure do. Tastes like more." And as he moved to replace the cork, Cailini violently protested, "No, no, no! If we're through drinking, let's smell."

"Here, take another. There's enough."

"You mean it?"

"Sure."

"Well, you talked me into it." He lifted the bottle again to his lips.

As Hervey inched his way out of their hole, his body pressed close to the squelching mud, Cailini softly called after him.

"Remember what I said."

"What was that?"

"You do the tilting."

4

THE night air was oppressive with dampness. Beads of supersaturation mingled freely with the odorous sweat. The rain had momentarily ceased and the wind had softened. In the darkness the coconut trees and the bamboo clumps had vanished.

Cailini leaning against the forward wall of the two-man foxhole, watching and listening, awaited Hervey's return. As he often did when he had no definite Army chore to do, he thought up sentences and paragraphs. He had written a lot this way, and it was a source of irritation to him that when he finally got an opportunity to put his thoughts on paper, he could not remember what he had already written in imagination. Only shadows of his emotions remained. That, or, if he did remember, the words had somehow lost their impact, were only foam on the sea, not the flow of the sea itself.

He had often said, to himself, if only you could crawl into a reader. If only for the time it took to read, you could transmit your communication by *feel*. If only you could make them *live* everything about war. What it *felt* like to have bullets rip open your stomach and see your guts spill onto the earth. What it was to have to shoot a fellow-being to save him the last suffering before inevitable death got him. What it was even to slaughter prisoners of war—because you hadn't the time

(perhaps the assault lay in the balance), because you couldn't spare the men, because transportation was all fouled up at the moment and it just wasn't convenient to remove those prisoners to the rear. And more. Yes, much more. What it was to love a man and see him shattered. On and on it went. The apprehension of entering combat, so sick were you, you messed your pants or puked onto the soil. The fatigue—the death fatigue that came after days of battle. The lulls when you wondered what in hell you were fighting for. When you laughed and laughed because once you had ambitions—wanting to be decent and to live in dignity. The times you remembered that once you'd nearly died of chicken pox or whooping cough or pneumonia—and how frantic your folks had been, and how the damn fools had pulled you through. You didn't have to ask: For what? Because you never asked obvious things any more—not when your heart and body and mind and spirit were beating you down and down with the answer.

If only you could communicate those things by *feel*. By actual *feel,* not by tricks, not by tenuous and inadequate abstract words and sentences.

Suddenly Cailini buried his face in his hands. His thoughts ricocheted within his bowed head and, as they had done a thousand times before, came out as nothing.

If only!

Yes, maybe then the bastards back home might stop and think before plunging again into the healing waters of indignation that would prepare World War III.

5

THERE was still some daylight left when Hervey had started on his tour of the squad. He told himself to hurry, but he knew it would be dark before he got back to Cailini. Now he muttered, impatient with himself because he had delayed so long in starting. He by-passed the hole that had been occupied by Gruber and crawled toward Zoole and Polson. They were the oldest and the youngest members of the squad, both riflemen and privates. Polson, a massive man with graying hair, was an original member of the squad. Zoole was a six-months war-old replacement. He had been inducted shortly after his eighteenth birthday and had been so eager to leave home he would happily have forfeited the farewell parties, his Anya's somber goodbye and the envy of his

schoolmates. He had hugged himself, concealed pride that had grown impatient before his father's sadness and his mother's unashamed tears. After the goodbyes were said, after his train had pulled out of the small Connecticut station, he had relaxed and allowed the falseness to leave his face, the falseness that had measured out the proper amount of regret he had had to show when leaving home. They, his mother and father, had looked so forlorn as they stood on the track waving goodbye.

Basic training had fascinated Zoole. He loved to fire the weapons, to hear their staccato stutter, and to smell the acrid explosives. The arduous marches under the Georgia sky were a sense of accomplishment rather than a duty. Though he complained at the KP and the latrine details, his complaint did not come from resentment. Everyone else bitched, and he had to be one of the boys. They introduced him to beer, got him drunk on a Saturday night celebration—someone's birthday. In the Army someone was always having a birthday. They had laughed when he coughed over his first smoke, a big and fat Havana cigar. They had roared when they finally ridiculed him into a visit to a cat house; they became hysterical when informed later by the madam that he had sneaked out, still uninitiated.

As the weeks of training merged into months, Zoole became glad he was infantry. Though it was without the glamor of the Air Force, the organized comfort of the Navy, the propaganda of the Marines, he did not care. The infantry, he felt, was the toughest, most thankless, dirtiest service of them all. Not the most dangerous, for no service could claim that title. Yet, whenever the need arose, he was quite prepared to maintain his boast of infantry superiority with whatever fistic ability he possessed.

In the beginning the Army had appealed to him because he wanted to be a part of its legendary camaraderie. His spirit was eager and, for the first time, he was removed from home, able to give himself to the abandon of youth.

It was not until he arrived on New Guinea that he learned that his romantic feelings sprang from illusion. It was the most profound lesson he had ever been taught.

Overseas, his illusions had gone. In their place was something monstrous. Casualties in basic training had grinned and winked. Casualties in combat lay where they had been thrown, mutilated and ugly, frighteningly still. Those casualties were men Zoole knew.

One by one they had passed from the squad, some dying suddenly and easily; some slowly and in agony.

Always there was horror, and at last he had ceased to react

to it. The day's tragedy arrived, was swept into the past with just so much comment—no more than the discussion of a football score.

Finally Zoole, the replacement, had become like the old squad members. It was impossible now to distinguish between them.

Once, standing in the foxhole with Hervey, Cailini had indicated Zoole with a nod of his head.

He had said, "That man-child."

Hervey had thought about that, like the paradoxical blending. The words were tailor-made for Zoole.

Hervey looked at his friend. "What is it they say? 'You hit the nail on the head'?"

"Something like that."

"That man-child," Hervey murmured. "Sure, that's Zoole."

"In combat he's as old as Adam. In bivouac, when nobody's getting hurt and nobody's dying, he becomes a kid again, like something just let out of junior high."

"And sometimes the two buddy up."

"He's never completely one or the other, but some of each."

"And if he gets out of this, that's how he'll wind up."

"Sure."

"Well, he'll have plenty of company."

"Yeah. He sure will."

Zoole too had expressed an opinion. He did it while waiting for the sergeant to make the evening round. He said to his buddy, Polson, "You know what, Ohio?"

"What?"

"I like the Sarge."

Polson, in his methodical way, after he had thought ponderously on the statement, felt safe to commit himself.

"I do too."

"You do? I'm glad."

After a pause, Polson said, "He's a nice fellow."

"He's a swell egg."

Zoole liked Polson but he wished the huge man would not think quite so long and hard before offering his remarks. Buddying with Polson was almost like buddying with a mute.

It took Polson five minutes to ask, "Why do you like him?"

"I don't know. Funny, I never thought about that. You either like a person or you don't, and that's as far as it goes, I guess."

He knew Polson would take half an hour to turn that over in his mind, so he continued talking, but now it was more of a soliloquy.

"He's a sort of a comforting guy to have around. You know,

I'd hate to go into an assault without the Sarge. Don't know why. After all, if I'm going to get mine, I'll get it. Sarge or no Sarge. But that's the way it is. You know, it is funny when you come to think of it. Why, exactly why, do you like someone?" Zoole grinned. "The Sarge sure can get alky when we're in bivouac." His forehead wrinkled in thought. "I don't know why I like the Sarge. Half the time he's a bastard. When he gets mad he's like something let out of hell. You can't ever relax when he's around. He'd kick your ass if he caught you."

He lapsed into a silence, finally saying, "I don't know why. I really don't. But I sure like him to be around."

He thought it useless to ask Polson but he'd try anyway. If he lived that long, he might get an answer.

"Do you know why?"

Zoole was amazed at the rapidity with which Polson nodded his massive head. It was actually less than a minute.

"You do?"

"Yes."

Zoole was astounded.

Then Polson shook his head. "But I can't tell you."

"You can't, or you won't? Which?"

"I can't. I don't know how."

"I don't get you."

"It's something I can't say."

"Oh!"

Then suddenly Polson said, "If you lived on my farm I could show you."

"You could? How?"

"Well, it's a lot like farming. And you'd have to live on the farm to find out. You'd have to plant seed and watch it grow. You'd have to see what the sun and the rain do to that seed."

"What else?"

Polson looked surprised. "What else?" he questioned.

"That's what I said."

"But there's nothing else. That's all."

"What do you mean, that's all?"

"You'd know then."

Zoole looked puzzled, then exasperated. Eventually he said, "I like you, Ohio. But, you know, you're nuts!"

Arriving at the Polson-Zoole foxhole, Hervey shouted greeting to the ex-farmer, and to Zoole, he said, "What do you know, kid?"

Zoole replied with the current popular crack. "Save your money and starve the whores."

"No whores around here."

"Ain't it the truth?"

"At least, we won't lose anybody to the medics through clap."

"I'll say. But, you know, I could use a whore right now."

Hervey laughed. "What would a kid like you do with a whore?"

"You bring one right here and I'll show you."

"Why you're barely out of diapers yet. I bet when you go to the toilet it's still yellow."

"Aw, Sarge!" he protested.

Hervey ruffled his hair. "Put your helmet on, kid."

He pleaded, "Not that, Sarge!"

"Why?"

"It's making me bald."

"Take your choice. What do you want? To lose a few hairs or get scalped?"

"Scalped?"

"Sure. Haven't you seen a man scalped by a Jap shell yet?"

"A tin helmet won't stop a shell."

"It will give you protection."

"All right then." Reluctantly he put it on.

Hervey laughed. "What's a few bald spots? What dame's going to look at your hair when you go home with all those medals?"

After they had drunk some Scotch, Hervey said to Zoole, "Look, kid, there's a space in the line. Between this hole and mine are two empty ones. One where Gruber was, and one where Curtis was. First thing in the morning, if no new orders come through, that is, you move into one of them."

"Okay."

As the sergeant began to move away, Zoole called, "Why wait until morning? Can't I move now?"

"What do you want to move now for?"

"Well, I tell you, it will be sort of dryer in Gruber's hole."

"What do you mean?"

"That mortar shell must have blown all the water and half the mud out."

"It's rained since."

"Not enough to fill it as bad as this one is filled."

"Why don't you bail the water out?"

"We did. But you know we can't bail mud out. It destroys the camouflage."

"That's true."

"So how about it."

"If that's what you want, go ahead. It's okay by me." As Zoole crawled out of his hole, Hervey cautioned, "But you

know, if you do switch, you won't be able to sleep tonight." He nodded in the direction of the Jap-held territory. "Those bastards might come infiltrating."

"That's okay. I slept today."

"How about Polson? Did he sleep?"

"Yeah."

"And another thing," Hervey added. "It's bound to be messy in Gruber's hole. Not all of him went up you know."

Zoole paused. "That's right. I'd forgotten about that." He shrugged—that shrug Hervey and Cailini had spoken of. In that moment he was all man. "What the hell anyway. At least it will be half dry."

Hervey watched him crawl away, feeling some slight disturbance move within him. He racked his mind to identify it, but could not. It was too light, too intuitive a thing. So he let him go, the half-uttered command to call him back silenced in his throat.

He moved on to the next hole.

6

THE next hole was the Automatic Rifle position. It was occupied by Tuthill, who was the gunner, and Lunagan, his assistant. As Hervey approached, he saw that Tuthill was sleeping. But he realized it was the gunner's turn to sleep. However, Lunagan also was asleep. Then, as Hervey crawled the remaining distance, he heard Lunagan's voice.

"Almighty God, please let me live . . . Don't let me die . . . I'll be good, God . . . all my life I'll be good if you just let me live this once . . . Please, God, please . . . don't let me be killed . . . Keep me safe this night . . . spare me . . . Almighty, wonderful God . . ."

Hervey clenched his fists and his lips stretched back tight. He leaned over the edge of the foxhole and his large palm grasped the nape of the man's neck.

Lunagan jumped, yelped and squirmed. Wildly he twisted around and faced the sergeant. His eyes were dilated with terror.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You!" Relief brought beads of perspiration to his face.

Hervey felt him tremble.

Anger rapidly followed Lunagan's fear. "Don't do that,"

he raved. "Don't ever do that again." He wiped his forehead free of the sudden sweat. "My God! I thought it was a Jap."

Hervey retorted, "If I catch you with your eyes closed when you're on lookout again, you'll wish to your precious God that it was a Jap!" He shook Lunagan fiercely. "Understand?"

"I was only—" Lunagan stopped.

Hervey's eyes were contemptuous. "Don't tell me. I heard you."

Stung, Lunagan shouted, "What's wrong with praying?"

Hervey looked hard at him, then shrugged his shoulders and sighed. Suddenly quiet, he said, "Pray all you want to. But next time pray with your eyes open."

"I can't concentrate with my eyes open."

The contempt came back to Hervey's eyes. "Get out of this hole!" he commanded.

"What are you going to do?"

"Get out."

Trembling, he obeyed, scrupulously careful to keep his body low and pressed to the earth.

"Now," said Hervey, "crawl to the end of the squad line. Get in Adams' foxhole and send him here."

"What for?"

"You aren't the assistant AR any more. You're a rifleman."

"Why?"

"Isn't it obvious?" the now exasperated Hervey shouted. "I can't trust you. You're not dependable. That's why."

"Oh!"

"So get your ass out of here and send Adams back."

There was a pause. Lunagan did not move. He wanted to say something but did not quite know how to word it.

"What's holding you?" Hervey demanded. "You anchored here or something?"

"Sergeant?"

"What?"

"Please—if I must switch—can't it be in the morning?"

"Why morning? What's wrong with now?"

"I'm—I'm—"

"Come on. Out with it."

"I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what? You have terrain protection from here to Adams."

"I know, but maybe—maybe the fellows have set the booby traps already."

Looking at the man's stricken face, Hervey felt himself relenting and he said less harshly. "No, Lunagan, you're quite safe. The traps won't be set until after I've made the rounds."

"Oh!"

After he had gone, Tuthill said, "He burns me." The gunner looked disdainfully at the departing figure. "Yellow rat!"

"I don't know. We all get yellow once in a while."

"Sure, sure we do." The gunner spread his hands expressively. "I know that. But what burns me is his habit of holding back in an assault. He lets himself get yellow. And what do you think that does to me? Sure puts me on a spot. More than once I've needed Lunagan, needed him bad. And where was he? Christ knows. Afterward he's said he got lost in the smoke and dust." Tuthill spat. "Lying son of a bitch!"

Hervey said, "Skip it."

Tuthill shut up reluctantly. Like all soldiers he was happy when expanding on a bitch.

"How's everything else?" Hervey asked.

"All right."

"Need anything?"

Tuthill grinned. "You don't happen to have a spare blonde in your pocket, do you, Sarge? Say about five eight? A hundred and twenty? One that knows her bedroom calisthenics?"

Hervey said, "Will you settle for a slug of Scotch?"

The gunner's eyes widened. "You're kidding?"

"Hell, no. Look!" He displayed the bottle.

"Holy Jesus! Straight from the heather country itself, huh?"

"That's right."

The gunner wet his lips with his tongue. "Don't mind if I do." Delighted, he reached up and took the bottle. He paused only to say, "Here's mud in your eye, Sarge."

"Thanks," said Hervey, dryly, "I've had it."

The sergeant looked in the direction Lunagan had crawled. He did not regret his harshness. It was his own peculiar trait to be obdurate with men who expected leniency. From the preceding months of combat he had grown to know Lunagan too well to permit him to escape from the squad imperatives lightly. With the exception of Adams, none of his squad were what was known as intrepid, yet occasions had made them that. The sudden surges of anger that were madness, the deathlike fatigue they often labored under (not giving a good goddam any more), the occasions the squad was struck by the loss of a man they particularly liked—all these could sometimes make them supremely reckless with their cherished lives.

But Lunagan, because he was essentially calculating, was different. He figured the risks with painstaking precision, weighing the pros against the cons, always in terms of Lunagan. If the chances added favorably, he became most happy; if the sum totaled a sad negative, he silently wailed his despair

and took steps to move himself into whatever security was offered. He crept into shell holes, brought up the rear, delayed behind some protective cover.

It was not the man's fear that angered Hervey and the squad. Fear they knew and felt themselves. Nor was it his apparent inability to surmount his terror that had brought them near to killing him—though it had kindled their contempt. What enraged them all was the fact that his absence decreased the assaulting impact of the squad. An assaulting team needed all the force and violence it possessed. Force and violence were security, and each drain on the squad's potency endangered them all. Lunagan saved himself by expending the squad.

So he had been removed early from the squad fraternity. By assignment Lunagan was technically present, but that was all.

7

LORRY ADAMS was the smallest squad member. He was a slightly built youth, with fine, delicately shaped hands which waved and circled when he spoke in curiously dainty gestures. His red-brown hair was soft and silky, reflecting light as he moved. His face, with its disproportionately large forehead, gave him an air of perennial boyishness.

He was an eager soldier, glad to do whatever was asked of him. With complete amiability, he assisted his squad colleagues; helped clean their rifles, rolled their packs—the thousand miscellaneous chores. Shyly, tentatively, he requested his one payment—that they be decent to him.

The squad liked Adams. He never trespassed or presumed, he never balked at their requests. And they had nothing to fear from him.

During bivouac lulls, they dragged him to a piano (if there was one around), and with adroit, professional ease he entertained them.

Yet his popularity had not always been in evidence. Long ago, in basic training, the squad had made it apparent that an incomparable difference separated Adams from them, and, because of this, he was made to suffer.

Adams, with his dainty gestures, his fastidiousness, his pathetic eagerness to be friendly, had embarrassed them. They were afraid to be seen talking to him. He reminded them of

things they had run away from, of dirty stories and marked-up psychology books, paragraphs slyly pointed out.

The first weeks were humiliating torture. His every spare moment from reveille to taps was filled. Even after lights-out, when he would escape to the latrine and sit on a toilet to write a letter, he was ordered to execute some chore.

And always they laughed, until at last it seemed to Adams that their laughter reverberated around the world. Some, the more courageous, did go so far as to admit they were sorry for him, but that did not stop them from laughing.

Each day he heard new cracks, saw the curious, accusing stares, and then again he would feel miserable.

At night, as he lay in bed, hidden by the friendly darkness, he gagged himself with a blanket and cried.

Once, he had walked to the river. He had stood on the bank and had watched the turgid, sullen movement of the water. He said to himself, here was escape. Drowning, he had read, was painless. But Adams knew he could swim. The first spasm of asphyxiation would make him fight and he would push upwards for air.

He had turned away from the river then, and watched the streetcars. Their giant bulks speeded along the length of track like clumsy rhinoceroses. Suicide here, he said, would be instantaneous.

He never knew what stopped him. Perhaps, the thought of the mess he would make. Perhaps it was concern for the poor devil who would have to clean up the mess. Anyway, he was too tired.

The thirty-mile ride back to camp passed with unbelievable speed. He sat in his seat, a small figure of loneliness and confusion. He held his knees high and embraced them with his arms. He bowed his head, and with his back he unknowingly attempted to hold back the bus.

Back at the barracks, he picked up his soap and towel. In his haste to leave he had not showered. The washroom had been crowded, and it embarrassed him to strip before other men. Somehow, as hard as he tried, he could not accustom himself to it. Nakedness before men seemed somehow indecent. He could not dismiss a sense of guilt. Guilt of what, he did not know, but guilt of something. At such times he would furtively attempt to conceal himself, but as there was no place to hide in the bare, open shower room, all he succeeded in doing was to make himself conspicuous. The other men would shout at him, poke him in the most private and sensitive parts of his anatomy. So whenever he could, he showered after everyone else had finished.

Tonight they were in bed and asleep. Their snores and heavy breathing informed him that he was, for once, safe from interference. Leaving the main dormitory that was filled with the smell of sleeping bodies, he went downstairs to the showers. The room was empty except for a stranger who sat on a toilet. It was evident he was sitting there not to avail himself of the toilet's prime use, but, as was a GI habit, to meditate.

Adams had never seen the man before. He had a friendly face, and Adams, a creature of intuitions and impulses, felt himself suddenly warming to him. He would have liked to have spoken or nodded, but because he anticipated a rebuke, he said nothing. Most likely, Adams thought, he was a new platoon member, and doubtless had been told about "our Lorry," or as he was sometimes called, "our Lucy."

Adams blushed.

He shaved silently, seemingly indifferent to the stranger, yet slyly, through the oblique angle of the mirror, he looked at the man.

He had a paradoxical face. Ugly, but a compelling ugliness. Though the features were pugilistic, there was something in the face that was not at all in keeping with brutality. The nose had once been broken and retained a slight twist to the left. The eyes were dark, almost black. The lips were full and firm, tucked in at each corner. The deep lines on his face were made prominent by the naked bulb overhead. The hairline had begun to recede, and what hair remained was black and cut short. Adams especially noted the thickness of his neck.

He imagined this stranger possessed all the qualities he wished he had himself.

Adams then remembered something a squad member had said—rape was just a case of the wrong man.

Adams could not imagine the stranger ever being the wrong man.

After he had shaved, he began to brush his teeth. Returning to the mirror, he saw that the stranger was staring at him. Rapidly Adams turned away, feeling the old sense of guilt stir.

The man spoke.

"You're Lorry, aren't you?"

He turned and faced him.

So they had already shot their mouths off! He had known they would! Now the stranger would be alien. Inwardly, Adams shrugged. That shrug had come to be the symbol of his resignation. Well, he would have found out anyway.

It didn't matter too much. One more to cater to, one more to laugh and wisecrack would not make much difference.

The stranger repeated his question. "You're Lorry, aren't you?"

And he smiled.

Adams' jaw dropped in astonishment. He had smiled. Not mockingly, not maliciously, but with friendliness.

"Yes, that's my name."

"They," he said, indicating the dormitory, "told me about you."

Adams stiffened.

"Is it true?"

He nodded mutely.

"You're not unique, you know."

"I'm not?"

"Hell, no." The stranger was emphatic. "But you knew that, didn't you?"

Adams stammered. "I don't know much. I'm all mixed up. They—" he nodded in the direction of the sleeping men "—told me all I know." Apologetically, he added. "It came so sudden. Hit me like a rock."

"But you must have known! What about when you were at school? I mean, didn't you ever suspect?"

"About the—" Adams turned his head.

The stranger nodded gently.

"No. You see, when I was a kid, and the other fellows at school talked about sex—or, you know, when they played around with each other—well, I'd walk away. I used to get—embarrassed, even guilty. I had such a funny feeling—that my mother would find out. And then I'd see her eyes—looking at me, so hurt, sort of betrayed, condemning me—me, now like all the other people, dirty." Adams coughed a laugh. "God knows, I didn't want to walk away. But I always did. So you see, I never gave myself a chance. Whenever somebody said sex, I ran away."

"When did you find out? Here?"

"I don't know. I suppose, deep inside me, I knew all along. All they did here was to give it a name. When these guys here said what they said, it was the first time I really ever let it come to the surface."

"You know, you could get a discharge. In fact, I'm amazed you ever got in the Army."

"Aw, you know how it is at induction center. You're just one of a herd, and all the medics are interested in is getting you through. Then they can go and sit at a bar, or call up some dame. They aren't interested in anything but filling their quota."

"But now that you are in, you could get out."

"Then what? Go home and listen to people gossiping behind my back? That's what they've been waiting for. Something concrete to pin on me."

"But it would be easier on you. Living at home, I mean. You'd be away from these smart GIs, and home is a sort of a protection."

"You don't know my home town." He looked at the stranger. It was the first time since his induction that he had looked directly into a man's eyes. "You from a big city?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. You don't know how vicious small towns are."

"They can't be any more vicious than it is here."

"Yes and no."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, nobody at home kicks me in the ass. I'll grant you that. They aren't that kind. They're much more clever. And what the hell are a few kicks in the ass? I'm learning how to take them. And I'm learning, slowly, how not to give a good goddam about anything or anyone. Now at home there's my mother. I don't ever remember my father. He took off before I was born. And I've a whole slew of aunts and uncles and cousins. My mother's okay. She's fine. All for me, regardless. And now, looking back, knowing what I know now, I realize she knew. But as for the others!—they're ashamed of me. And I guess I can't blame them. But they make it tough on my mother. You know. Sly, malicious digs. So, you see, when I'm away, she doesn't get all that. And everybody's happy."

"Everybody but you?"

Adams said nothing.

"What are you going to do, kid?"

"Stay in the Army."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. Wait until I get into combat, I guess. Maybe I'll get mine."

"You want that?"

Adams shrugged.

The stranger said, "Life isn't altogether man and woman in bed, you know."

"According to the guys around here it is."

"Bullshit. And wishful thinking. Take the last zero off the number of times they've said they've laid a woman and you'll come pretty close to the truth."

"They sure sound convincing."

"If you were out to convince yourself, you'd sound that way too. I know these guys. It is what is called sounding-off."

They stopped talking for awhile, then Adams asked, "What's your name?"

"Hervey. Bill Hervey."

Adams itched to shake hands with the man, but he held back. He knew he did not so much want to shake hands as he wanted to touch him. For that he attempted to upbraid himself, and only his excitement knew the extent of the failure to upbraid.

Again the silence.

Then Hervey asked, "Is that your reason for wanting to stay in the Army?"

"I don't get you."

Hervey stood up, walked toward the wash basins and leaned against one.

"Because you think," he said, "that when you get into combat you'll get yours?"

Adams nodded.

Then Hervey began to speak, and Adams tried hard to listen to the words that were spoken. Instead, he found himself drawn to the tone of the voice, the sonorous bass. He wanted to move his attention away from that, wanted to concentrate on the meaning and communication of the words, their value and profundity. It was a vain attempt, and, he admitted to himself, he did not try too hard.

The man's question cut through his mood. He heard him say, "But there must be something you can do? You can't be all tragedy?"

He looked at him.

"Isn't there something?"

"I can play a piano."

"Are you good?"

"I think so."

"Don't you know?"

"Yes—I'm good. You see—" he felt the need to explain "—I had to have something. It sort of helped me. I was lonely." Looking at Hervey, he said, "I don't suppose you've ever felt like that?"

"You're wrong. I've been lonely. Often."

"I don't mean alone."

"No. You meant what you said. Lonely. I know the difference."

"Well, I was lonely. I've always been lonely. So, you see, I had to have something. When I was young, my mother made me play the piano. She did all kinds of things to encourage me. Bribed me, flattered me, got mad, laughed and called my practice my jam session. When I got older, she didn't have to

do those things any more. I practiced on my own, loved to do it. Hours each day. When things got bad, I'd play and play. Sometimes all night long. My mother didn't say anything, but I guess she knew. I'd play fierce. Bang on the keys. I must have thought I could bang it right out of me. Yes, that was silly. I don't know though; it did help. Once an art group, some fool local bunch, got me to give a recital. Beethoven. That made folks even more suspicious. That's the way small-town people are. You know, all that stuff about artists? They figured that anybody who liked music as much as I did had to be different. But it did give me prestige. Now I had an excuse. Also, it stopped some of the wisecracks, and they didn't laugh quite so much. Well, by that time, playing a piano fascinated me. I couldn't have stopped if I'd wanted to. That something inside me—so big and wonderful, and yet at the same time, awful, frightening—I thought I'd burst. I wanted to love people, but they wouldn't let me. I wanted them to like me, and they certainly wouldn't do that. But come hell or high water, I had to tell them something. What, I don't know. I can't define it. But I knew that when I played I was getting that something across. I guess, I don't know, I think it was beauty."

Adams forgot himself as he approached the core of his trouble. His eyes shone and his gestures became more pronounced. Hervey, observing him, realized then why the squad was embarrassed. Had the occasion been less important to Adams, Hervey would have told him to put his hands in his pockets.

Again Adams coughed a laugh, and Hervey saw that the excitement of telling the story was gone. He was himself again, hurt and miserable.

"You know, it's funny," Adams continued. "Everybody is grabbing for happiness, but if they get too much of it they're bored. They demand peace. Give them peace and the first thing you know they're looking for a fight. Some people crave beauty. Give it to them, like it was given to me, and what happens? It consumes them, like it's consuming me. Everything's crazy. I've tried to figure it out, but I haven't gotten anywhere. Now I'm sick of trying. I'm sick and tired of trying."

Hervey did not move. He continued to gaze steadily at Adams.

"I'm glad there's a war on. Damn glad." Adams' voice took on a new note, slowly rising in pitch. "It's what I've been waiting for. All these years I've waited for it. Soon now we'll all be in combat. I've got a hunch I won't come back. Then it will be over. At last there will be peace. And then nobody can hurt me any more."

Quietly Hervey asked, "You mean that?"

Tears pushed their way into Adams' eyes. "I've taken all I can take." Looking at Hervey, feeling again the wave of excitement, knowing the hollowness of his ache, he sobbed, "Now not even music can help me."

Hervey asked, "Do you still play?"

"No."

"Why? Isn't there a piano around here?"

"Oh, sure. There's one in the company recreation hall."

"Then why?"

"Well—" Adams spoke reluctantly. Hervey, in his effort to help, was making him feel worse. More than ever before misery gripped him. He said, "They call me—Lucy." Then, angrily, "They're always making me do something. Clean their rifles. Fetch stuff from the PX. Scrub latrines. Always something. Now I wouldn't play for these bastards if they got down on their bended knees and begged me to."

"Can anybody else play?"

"Tuthill can chord a few old tunes and Polson plays hymns. Outside of that, nobody. They don't know I can. If they did, they'd make me sit on that stool all night and every night. I'd be forced to do it."

"Wouldn't that be better than cleaning rifles?"

"Sure. But why should I play for them? Why should I make them happy? After the way they've booted me around?"

"I thought you wanted to spread beauty?"

"I'm not Jesus Christ. I'm human. I can hate, just like anybody else. And I'm damned, I'm goddamned if I'll play for them."

"Why do you let them hit you? Why not fight back?"

"I don't know how to fight. I never did."

Quietly Hervey asked, "Then what are you going to do when you get in combat?"

Months afterwards, when the sum of Hervey, and himself, began to total, Adams remembered that question. And it was in those later months that he recognized its sheathed power. If he had answered otherwise, he would never have seen combat, would never have completed basic training.

He had said, "Combat will be different."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. I can squeeze a trigger as well as anybody else."

"Then it isn't that you're *afraid* to fight?"

"No, I'm not afraid."

"Not when you have a rifle in your hands?"

Adams wondered if that was a sneer.

"It isn't that," he told Hervey. "With boxing you have to

be fast. Being powerful helps too. . . . And if you're not, and the other guy is, it's stupid to scrap."

Hervey began to grin.

"In war," Adams continued, "that rule doesn't hold. I mean, not for the individual—only for the Army as a body."

The grin was now halfway up Hervey's face.

Again, in retrospect, Adams knew that if he had planned the words it could not have been to better effect. For when Hervey asked, "You won't get scared?" he had shot back, "Sure, won't you?" and the man had laughed loudly.

"I like you, kid," Hervey had said.

Adams flushed with happiness.

"I have one of those fancy names. I'm a squad leader. Number one squad. You're in number two, aren't you? I'd like to have you in mine."

And Adams, because he was so happy, found himself with the courage to say, "Try and keep me out."

"Fine. I'll get the top-kick to fix it tomorrow."

Adams did not answer. He felt that if he did, he would choke on the words, but he knew the man understood; and that was all that mattered. Just so long as he understood.

Next morning, before reveille had sounded, Adams was awakened suddenly and painfully. It seemed that his cot had sprouted wings, for it rose, twisted and dumped him bodily onto the hard floor.

Every occupant of the floor was awakened by the noise. They were angry at being disturbed before reveille until they saw what had happened, then they laughed. Tuthill was giving Adams hell again.

"Hey! Lucy! Where were you last night? You took off, didn't you? You've got a nerve. Didn't I tell you to clean my rifle?"

Adams' body ached from the fall.

Tuthill advanced toward him. "You should know better by now, Lucy. You should know you can't get away with that." His stance was menacing. "You can clean the rifle now, see?" Then he threw the weapon at him.

Adams was never quite sure what happened then. Perhaps it was because of Hervey, half sitting in bed, quietly watching, even waiting. But something happened. He felt the savage violence that surged up from the pit of his stomach. He felt the good, clean hatred wash over him. The rifle was in his hands. He grabbed it by the barrel, held it like a baseball bat. He saw Tuthill's face, laughing. He swung, packing every ounce of strength into the blow. Then Tuthill was not laughing any

more. He lay where he had fallen. Blood flowed from somewhere on his scalp, down around his ear, and slowly spattered on the floor.

Adams stood over him, flung the weapon away, shouted, almost weeping. "Clean your own goddam rifle, you goddam bastard!"

He turned and stumbled toward the latrine. His hands shook violently and he could barely stand. He wanted to run, but because every eye watched him, he forced himself to walk. But he had to get to that bathroom; he just had to get to a toilet fast.

Training lost its misery. Adams found that time passed rapidly. Basic training, though never satisfying, acquired a measure of serenity. The evening hours were especially pleasant.

One night, when he was sitting in the company recreation hall, Adams listened to Tuthill, newly discharged from hospital, chording on the piano. He played "Roll Out the Barrel" with a steady, chopping monotony. Several bored GIs were grouped around him. They asked for various pieces. Usually Tuthill's reply was a negative, or that he would try. Mostly the attempt expired in a premature death after a dozen stumbling bars.

Adams had looked up and had seen Hervey standing over him.

"Your fingers itching?"

Adams laughed. "Yeah."

"Well—scratch them."

He had looked toward the group, hesitated, then said, "They're pretty well satisfied."

"Get going."

He had stood up, felt the old apprehension gnawing at him.

"Mind if I play a bit?" he asked.

Tuthill shot him a venomous glance. Instinctively he raised his hand, felt his bandaged head.

One of the group asked, "Can you play?"

"A little."

Tuthill sat on the stool, debating. He was tired of playing, and even more tired of telling men he could not play their requests. But he hated to give the stool to Adams. Since his return from hospital, he knew that every man was watching him, quietly waiting to see what line his revenge would take. During the few days he had spent in hospital he had said a thousand times he would smash that little queer bastard when he got out. But when he did get out, when he had looked at Adams, he was not so sure. He had said then—you can't ever

tell with these people. They were crazy. He had read in books that they were. And now he knew Adams was not so puny as they had thought. He touched the bandage again and felt his head throb. Christ, no, Adams wasn't so puny. Aloud he had told the squad, frequently and at great length, that he would get even. But he was going to bide his time. He said something about waiting for the psychological moment. He looked very sly and knowing when he said that. Afterwards the new squad leader had talked to him. He had said a lot in a few terse sentences. Something about the fact that some people take a long time to get aroused, but when they do—watch out! They stopped at nothing short of murder sometimes. The squad leader had put his hand on his shoulder, had told him, that he, Tuthill, was a nice guy, and that he, the squad leader, would hate like hell to see anything bad happen to him. After all, even the heavyweight champion could have a knife stuck in him while he slept.

So Tuthill got off the stool, and said to the audience at large that he was tired of playing.

Adams took his place, afraid someone would laugh—and someone did.

It was Cailini who had laughed, but he had been amused at Tuthill not at Adams. And Tuthill, because he was Tuthill, quite blandly assumed that Cailini was laughing at Adams. Several other GIs joined in Cailini's laughter. They had no inkling what the joke was about, but they laughed regardless, protecting the vulnerable territory of their egos. They must never be suspected of stupidity. That was a mortal sin. And not being able to penetrate a joke was a sure way to have one's name changed to "stupid."

Adams' shoulders hunched forward. He was more hurt than he had ever been before. The laughter pained him because he believed he had smashed it when he had attempted to smash Tuthill's head.

He sat and brooded, and as he brooded something of the Tuthill incident reached out and touched him. He felt the anger beginning to rise again, softly at first, then as it swept through him, wildly, fiercely, insanely.

He heard the growing mumble of impatience, shifted feet, whispered comments, laughs.

He set his jaw, and with exacting thoroughness he adjusted the stool, worked his fingers, pondered on his choice.

He decided on Gershwin.

Their impatience grew. Someone shouted for Tuthill who, having forgotten his fatigue, eagerly moved forward to take back his seat. Hervey nonchalantly removed the cigarette from

his lips, placed it between his thumb and second finger and skilfully flicked it, hitting Tuthill on his cheek.

Adams lifted his hands over the keyboard. They were trembling.

Bastards! That's what they were! Stupid sons of whores! Well—he'd show them!

His hands dipped and struck, and music spilled from the piano, filling the room with its vibrant cascades. Tuthill backed to the rear and stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. Hervey, who thought he knew Adams better than anyone present, was surprised and pleased at the passion of the playing.

A soft tonal motif followed, and the crowd edged forward, interested by the adroit movement of Adams' fingers. Then came the familiar passage, tantalizing them with hunger for the past and the promise of tomorrow. The music leapt and stabbed. Cailini thought of stars dancing on a harp. With ease and fluency, Adams plunged into the wild mechanics of the rhapsody. It hurt them because it said what they already knew. They were GIs, soon to embark for overseas, perhaps forever. The music was home, was the America already lost.

He swung into the final movement, melodic and strong and emotional. Then, as abruptly as he had begun, he finished.

The crowd had massed around the piano. No one spoke as he turned and faced them. A few shuffled their feet, embarrassed by their feelings. There was no applause, no backslapping, no sound at all.

Then Slingluff said, "That was okay—" and almost shyly, added, "—Adams."

Happiness surged through Adams. *Not Lucy but Adams.* He looked at the floor boards.

"Yeah!" Someone else said, "that sure was okay."

It was Hervey who rescued him, rescued him and the squad. He said, "Play something else."

The spell was broken and the racket broke loose.

"Yeah," they cried, "play something else."

Scores of requests were thrown at him.

"Play 'The Blue Danube.' "

"Play *'Clair de Lune.'* "

"Play 'Stardust.' "

"Play 'Alexander's Ragtime Band.' "

"Play boogie-woogie."

One GI, a visitor from a rival company, asked, "Can you play Beethoven's Fifty-Seventh?"

The first squad turned on him. "Can he? Why he can play any goddam piece any goddam member of that two-bit Com-

pany B can name." They shouted, "Show him, Adams! Prove it to the bastard!"

And so Adams plunged into the intricacies of Beethoven's *Appassionata.*

Later that evening when the lights were out and the squad in bed, Hervey, passing by Adams' cot, whispered, "They're not such bad guys, are they?"

"No," said Adams, "they're okay."

"Not when you've rammed it down their throats that you're a better man than they are?"

"I guess so."

After a pause, Hervey said, "Good night."

"Good night."

Hervey went to bed, and his arms stretched up and his hands pillowing his head, he began to laugh. At first it was a quiet chuckle, cynical and malicious, then it grew until his whole body shook with mirth. At last, he laughed himself to sleep. Even in his dream the laughter pursued him. He could not escape it. It was on either side of him, behind and in front, pressing in, suffocating. It grew worse. His sides ached as though a giant were squeezing his ribs.

He dreamed he was the Emperor of Japan. And it seemed that the emperor had an excellent set of crooner's tonsils. The gloriously funny thing was that in next to no time he, the Emperor of Japan, became America's most beloved idol.

With some reservation, Adams had been accepted by the squad as a member of its fraternity. They had ceased to make demands on him; instead, occasionally, they requested—and he gave, for the pianist's virtue of generosity was close to the age-old feminine quality of receiving through giving.

They had grown to like Adams, though not as they liked their buddies, not warmly or poignantly. It was more of a casual admiration, because he had courage, because he did not whine. It was because they pitied him, knowing the source from which his genius came. But mostly they felt for Adams during the heat and the savagery of battle. He shone then. His pale-blue eyes took on a feverish brightness. In his anxiety to fight, his gestures were no longer embarrassing. Looking at him, the squad had forgotten disgust and hilarity. Each time he squeezed the trigger of his rifle, each time he assaulted with grenades, each time he bayoneted an enemy, they saw he was fighting the elusive and implacable force within himself.

There were other men who fought the enemy with eagerness, driving themselves to hate and kill, always ahead of the

line of attack. To these the squad had turned, sometimes angry, but mostly contemptuous.

"What are you trying to do, Joe? Win the war yourself?"

"Playing Japs and banzai?"

"Look at the goddam Medal of Honor candidate!"

"Here-o, here-o, will lie the hero!"

But to Adams they said nothing, and if men from other platoons wisecracked, they were abruptly told, "Shut up!"

Adams had brought injured men back under fire, he had assaulted and wiped out sniper nests, he was always first to volunteer for patrol duty. He was exalted during the turmoil of battle. He was strong and aggressive. And when they were resting in bivouac, or even in the foxholes during the times when the battle became stagnated, he once again became the being he ordinarily was—quiet, shyly eager, anxious to please, happy to serve.

Then, after the lull, when the bombs began to fall again, when the other men trembled in mortal fear, a glory looked out from Adams' eyes.

8

LYING beside Tuthill's foxhole, Hervey turned and looked at the gunner.

"What's up, Sarge?"

"Nothing. Just thinking."

Tuthill grinned. "Bet you it was a woman?"

"No. I was thinking about Adams."

Tuthill said, "Funny little guy, ain't he?"

"Funny?"

"You know what I mean."

"Yes, I know."

Tuthill thought a minute. "Must be hell! Imagine being born like that? Christ!" He shook his head. "I couldn't take it myself. Think I'd shoot myself."

"No, I guess it isn't easy."

"What would you do, Sarge?"

"I guess I'd do what Adams is doing. Put up with it. What else is there to do?"

"Don't ask me. Can't these doctors help people like him?"

"Psychiatrists?"

"Yeah."

"Most of them don't want to be helped. Once they can get

around to accepting themselves, it's okay by them." Dryly he added, "I understand some of them have a wonderful time."

"Is that so?" Tuthill paused before asking, "About Adams now?"

"What about him?"

"Do you think he's accepted it?"

"No, and I doubt if he ever will."

"Why?"

"He can't get over feeling ashamed."

"But if he lives long enough? Don't you think he will then?"

"Adams won't live that long."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. I just feel he won't. He'll get his."

"It's amazing he didn't get his the first day of combat."

"That's what I mean. He can't go on having bad luck like this all the time."

"You said *bad* luck, Sarge."

"Did I?"

"You sure did."

"I guess my tongue slipped."

"Must have."

They were quiet for a moment. A sly glow had moved into Tuthill's eyes. He was becoming excited. Hervey saw it. Immediately Tuthill resumed his attitude of careless interest. He began to whistle, elaborately nonchalant.

The lines of worry on Hervey's face deepened. He realized that Tuthill had been asking questions he obviously could answer for himself. Tuthill was no intellectual, but he was richly informed on the subject of sex, a knowledge that sprang from experience.

"Look," said Hervey.

"What?'

"Look me in the face."

"What's up, Sarge?"

"Take that plum out of your mouth. I'm no goddam fool."

"What's eating you?"

Emphasizing each word, Hervey said, "Watch your step, Tuthill."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're a liar. You know goddam well what I mean."

"Sarge—!"

"Sarge nothing. Just remember what I said. I won't stand for it, Tuthill."

"Stand for what?"

Hervey shouted. "Any damn foolishness. That's what. You keep your filthy hands to yourself."

Before the sergeant's stare, Tuthill turned away.

More then ever Hervey did not want to put them together. But there was no one else who could handle a machine gun as well as Adams. There was nothing else to do. He must take the chance. He went on, "And another thing."

"What?"

"You've been wanting a new assistant gunner for a long time."

Tuthill nodded.

"Now Adams is the bravest man in the squad."

Another slight nod.

"The best assistant gunner I could give you."

"Yeah."

"He won't give you any of the trouble you had with Lunagan."

"No."

"That's why I'm giving him to you. You need a good man. It's an important job."

"Yeah."

"But at the same time, Adams can be pretty easily imposed upon. And I don't want you taking advantage of it."

"Me, Sarge?"

"Yes, you."

"I wouldn't do a thing like that. Honest, I wouldn't."

"Don't hand me that! I know you, Tuthill. You've got a streak in you that delights in having people do things for you. Hell, you'd even have them take a crap for you if possible."

The gunner looked swiftly at Hervey, a hurt expression in his eyes.

"I mean it now," Hervey said. "You do your own duties. You clean the gun when it's your turn. I'm not giving you Adams for him to be your personal valet. Get me?"

"You got me all wrong, Sarge."

"Like hell I've got you all wrong! I've known you too long to be fooled by you now. So don't forget what I've said. About this and the other. I won't stand for it."

As Tuthill opened his mouth to reply, Hervey cut in, "Quiet, here's Adams!"

Adams disliked crawling through the mud. It necessitated cleaning oneself afterwards, an ardous job. Other GIs allowed the mud to dry upon them, and when dry it would flake loose. But not Adams.

He thanked the sergeant for the offer of a drink, but he'd rather not. He did not care for the stuff. He wished he did care.

As Hervey crawled away, he left Adams laboriously endeavoring to clean his uniform.

Tuthill's voice vibrated over the distance.

"For Christ's sake! You ain't going on no dress parade! For Christ's sake!"

9

WITH a troubled heart Lunagan had crawled toward Adams in order to exchange foxholes. He had wanted this transfer for some time, but now that he had it, he realized that Hervey had made him pay. And the price—more squad contempt.

Softly and obscenely Lunagan cursed Hervey. Then sharply and with authority in his tone, he ordered Adams to "Get the hell out of here!"

He could have smashed his rifle-butt in Adams' face in that moment. It irritated him to madness that Adams, the one squad member he despised, should be held in esteem by the squad. Upon every given occasion, Lunagan heaped his two favorite insults upon Adams. "That goddam sucker of a hero, that queer." Nothing was lower in Lunagan's opinion. The second insult he threw in for effect, and in his honest moments admitted it. Actually he did not care if Adams was a queer or not. That was Adams' "tough shit." But the first slur was another matter, for when the squad quietly spoke their admiration of some act of valor, Lunagan wanted to puke. He himself wanted to be their friend, and when they loudly and profanely rejected him and accepted Adams, he had grown to hate with a passion of which he had not believed himself capable.

He had never been an outsider before. In civilian life he had always managed to wedge himself into whatever group in which he desired membership. Now, with the squad, it was an about-face.

They were the strangest fraternity Lunagan had ever known, not at all like church, office or school societies.

This fraternity, seemingly held together by flippancy and casual familiarity, was actually an impregnable clan, yet the ties creating it were intangible and treacherously profound.

Lunagan doubted if any squad member even knew of the existence of such ties. It was as Cailini had once said, "Catch a butterfly, hold it in your hand, then release it. Its power of flight has largely gone because the wing-dust that gave it bal-

ance remains in your hand." And now, Lunagan knew, it was so with the squad. Only emotions could define their damn camaraderie, nameless and complex emotions buried in deep and elusive and forgotten substance. Lunagan despaired. It was like trying to pick up quicksilver. Some tiny particles would stick to your hand, but the bulk would escape.

The more he thought about the squad, the farther away it moved, and again he would have to heal himself with his own unhappiness. It did not help him to repeat what little he had discovered about them. That they were devotional without the awareness of devotion. They were minus the vice of virtue. They were insensitive to gratitude, fraternal acts were accepted as something expected. Now he knew, he could never savor what he had not tasted. Then, at night, alone in his foxhile, he would weep and he would talk to the only friend he had, God.

He knew he fought to live; they fought to end the goddam war. Life, after months of combat, had ceased to become their primary imperative. Each member has passed beyond the first illusion of war—belief that he would live and the other man die. So they exposed themselves, they took chances that made Lunagan tighten up until his very blood seemed to congeal. After it was over and his nausea had passed, a terrible bitterness assailed him. He told himself it was okay if the stupid bastards got killed, but it was criminal of them to try and drag him with them. Quite early he had grown wise to their reckless gambling with death, having seen too many men lose. So he gave up what little pretense of valor he had shown. He could always be seen bringing up the rear. And when they jeered at him, he had shrugged, had looked at the torn bodies of the dead, had said, "I am alive." They had shouted that perhaps some of the dead might have lived if Lunagan had added his violence to the assault. Because even that did not move him, they had almost killed him. It had taken all the command Hervey could wield to quiet them.

10

THE last foxhole contained within the territory covered by the first squad was occupied by Robins and Rosinski.

Robins was the squad's only married man, and he was never happier than when talking about his Martha. He had talked about her so often, their lives together, the intimacies they

had shared, that his partner Rosinski had on several occasions looked around the foxhole, vaguely wondering where the hell Martha had disappeared to. Most of the time when Robins talked, Rosinski only pretended to listen, for he himself was buried in his own cherished memories. But during the brief pauses, he would murmur politely, "Is that so?" or, "Well, what do you know about that?"

Rosinski was an understanding GI, and because he was a lonely one, he permitted Robins his long monologues.

Sometimes—not often, but sometimes when his loneliness was especially bad—he would turn to Robins and quietly, tenderly, say, "Shut up, Joe. Shut up, will you?"

And he remained quite aloof to Robins' entreaties: "What's the matter? Something wrong? Something I said?"

He would remain silent and shake his head.

"Can't you tell me? Look, you know, it sometimes helps to get things off your chest."

"Nothing, Joe. It's nothing."

"But—"

"Forget it."

He never did tell Robins, but once he had explained to Cailini that, "—I can't tell him. If I do, he won't ever be able to talk about his Martha again. And when he talks about her, he forgets the loneliness. Why, it's the nearest he gets to actually being with her."

Cailini had said, "Yes, I know," and he had nodded his head understandingly.

Rosinski had looked right into Cailini's eyes. "I wonder if you do? I wonder if you really do?"

"Hell, man, you're not the only guy who's lonely around here."

"I know that. But don't you see, it's different with me? My loneliness isn't obvious like most guys'. Like, say, Robins'. Lonely for his wife. Or Polson's. Lonely for his farm. Mine's —well, different. Subtle."

"Go on."

"At first, after my wife and kid went, it was because I hadn't been killed with them. You know how death is. Always tougher on the poor bastard who lives. That's why I joined the Army at the beginning of the war."

"Then what loneliness is it now?"

"I don't know. And that's what hurts. Like I said. Not being obvious, but subtle. And it's driving me crazy trying to figure it out."

"You've—gotten over—your wife and kid and the accident?"

"Yes—and no. That tragedy is still *my* tragedy, so it will always be the most awful, bitter, and yet sweetest thing in my life."

"Sweetest?"

"Yes, because when things here get so bad that you're ready to put a gun to your head, thinking about that tragedy somehow—not that it makes me better!—but it does cure me enough that I can live one more day."

"I see."

"And there's more. Much more."

"What?"

"Living with these guys."

"What about living with these guys?"

"The things that are always happening."

"Things?"

"Yeah. The tragedies that hit every day. *Their* tragedies. Now what kind of a *human* being do you think I'd be if I weren't moved by them?—if my life was no more than a day after day licking of my own wounds?"

"Go on."

"Remember that time a mortar shell exploded prematurely and blinded Jimmy Paul? I saw him after it happened. You should have looked at his eyes then and seen what they saw in their blackness. Then there was the time we were about to advance across open terrain and the Japs had a bead on us. We didn't know where their fire would come from. So somebody had to show himself and draw that fire. It was Espedahl's turn, but his buddy, Goldberg, put out his hand and said, 'No. Let me.' And before Espedahl could stop him, Goldberg had stood up. That was the end of Goldberg."

His voice barely a whisper, Cailini said, "You don't have to quote any more. I remember. And I see what you mean."

In a like whisper, but with controlled fierce passion, Rosinski said, "But do you understand? And can you explain why, why, why the loneliness is worse than ever before? Because, I tell you, Bob, if they don't stop dying for each other, I'll go mad. I just can't stand by any more watching it. You don't know what it does to me. It tightens a hard lump inside me that feels exactly like—"

Almost accusingly, Cailini said, "Love?"

Rosinski paused for a minute before replying. "I don't know." Then, "No. Not love. What I said. Loneliness."

"Maybe they're the same thing."

"You think so?" Again he paused. "You know, maybe you've got something there."

"Or is it that people can't bear to live without love?—and it

is so hard to come by—so their soul's imagination manufactures this other thing, loneliness, a remarkable synthetic that's just off-taste enough to make you smash the universe that's you in order to create the real thing?"

Wearily, unhappiness echoing in his voice, Rosinski said, "I don't know. I haven't got that far yet." He looked at Cailini. "You see, I'm not like you. I don't think so hot. About all I can do is feel."

Cailini wanted to smile but refrained.

Rosinski continued. "Life's a Christ's bastard. Do you know what it's all about? You're a writer. You should know something about this loneliness—love—call it what you like."

"I'm not a writer yet."

"You're going to be one."

"I *hope* to be one."

"Have it your own way. But do you know?"

"No. And I don't know anyone who does."

"Don't you even know the beginning of what it's all about? I remember once you told me—of course you were drunk at the time!—you joined up so that you could watch the way people acted under great pressure. Well, you've had over two years."

"That isn't the reason I enlisted," Cailini protested.

"But you said—"

"I lied."

"Why?"

"If I told you the truth you'd laugh."

"No I won't. And I'll keep my mouth shut."

Cailini thought for a long time before he replied. Rosinski waited so long he began to believe Cailini had not heard. But at last Cailini did reply.

"You won't tell Hervey?"

"Hervey? But he's your buddy." Rosinski was amazed. "You mean to say you haven't told your own buddy?"

"No. I haven't."

"Why, man, why?"

"Hervey's clever. And like nearly all truth, malicious. So much so, it's sometimes too potent to take. Spiritually, Hervey's upper class, while I'm still stuck in the lower middle. If Hervey knew why I really enlisted, he'd laugh until he wet his pants."

Rosinski sat up. "Man alive, you've sure got me curious. Now you'll have to tell me."

"Okay then. Listen." Cailini laughed, embarrassed at himself, now not at all sure that he could tell Rosinski. And Rosinski, watching, knew the struggle that went on inside Cailini. In

his quiet way he was deeply moved. It was one of those rare moments when he could feel his soul gather into a knot of eloquence in his throat, but he said nothing.

Cailini again breathed deeply, then plunged.

"I went to war because of a Maryland skyline."

Rosinski looked puzzled.

Cailini asked, "Isn't that the most jackass thing you ever heard?"

"I'd say it was sentimental."

"I'm glad you said that because now I can deny it."

"But I never heard of anything more sentimental?"

"Wait. Let me talk this out my own way."

"Go ahead then."

"I'll tell you about that skyline." He paused to assemble his thoughts. "It was right opposite our front porch. It is the spot where the South and West and Rhodes rivers meet and join the Chesapeake Bay."

Listening, Rosinski heard Cailini's voice warm. It was as though he were speaking of someone he loved.

"I looked at that scene every day of my life. For hours at a time I'd sit on one of the porch swings, looking between the cherry tree that leans so oddly to the left and the willow whose long tendrils finger the earth each time the wind blows. There's the white convent that's straight ahead across the bay, the duck blinds scattered all around, the long sweeps of water stretching in every direction."

Now Rosinski had to strain to hear the slowly spoken whispers.

"There was something about that skyline that moved me. Something about it—or something in it. I didn't know which. But always I felt that whatever-it-was pulling at me. If I went away, I couldn't wait to get home, to look again, to try and figure out what, just what, it was."

Rosinski leaned forward, and by his very nearness unawaredly trying to help.

"Some summer nights when the sun sank in a haze, it turned the water into golden, living, sacramental wine—and then you knew that something, the answer to all the loneliness on earth, was closer than it had ever been before—right there, just barely beyond your reaching fingers' grasp. And it was then that you knew, if you could walk but one step on that mystical golden water, you could grab it."

Cailini paused. He asked Rosinski, "Have you ever tried to walk on the water?"

Rosinski shook his head.

"Well, don't. Though if you must, be naked, or wear a swimsuit."

"You got wet?"

"I got a beating—from my old man."

Rosinski grinned.

Cailini asked, "But do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Not yet, but go on."

"Well, it didn't make any difference one way or the other—walking on the water, getting the stars to sing, swallowing a rainbow, flying in the golden mist—it couldn't be done because it was all out of this world. And so, I couldn't grab the whatever-it-was. Oh, I went nearly crazy trying to figure that damned insistence out. But I got nowhere. I wanted to talk to someone, anybody at all, but I didn't know a soul who was gentle enough to have sympathy, let alone understanding. So I kept my mouth shut, and my restlessness stayed here in my heart, as stark and as mad as ever."

Lines of brooding creased Cailini's thin, fierce face. And Rosinski, interested to a point of arrogant impatience, demanded, "What then?"

Cailini came back to the Philippines.

"I grew up." Then he paused, listened to what he had said. "What am I saying? I got older. Then came Pearl Harbor. One month later I was in the Army. I figured that maybe the war and what we'd all have to go through would either rid me of the skyline, or, maybe, answer it."

"Did it answer?"

"A little—I think. I don't know for sure."

"But you did discover something?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Take it easy. You're getting ahead of me."

"All right. Tell it your own way."

"You remember how it was during those early days of war?"

"Basic training?"

"Yes. A hell of a lot more discipline than there is now. Everybody was low, knowing they had a damn long war to fight, and for the first time ever imagination put the taste of death among their tongues. The Army was like living at the bottom of the universe. So much brass and chickenshit you could feel it running out your ears. Well, it did something to you. Made you feel like running berserk. I remember how I used to lie in bed at nights and think out all kinds of ideas—like cutting our CO's little pecker off, and when I'd done that, I'd tantalize the whore with some ravishing nude dame.

"You see, Rosie, every thing we all had was directed to

one purpose. Getting our own back on the bastards who made our lives so miserable. I know that's how it was with me. I was prepared to do anything, and I didn't care who I hurt, just so long as I hurt someone. Their goddam chicken was trespassing on something—yes, beautiful—inside me. I knew then they were out to destroy that same something that had been born on the Chesapeake. And I was so goddamned afraid they would succeed.

"Now, looking back, I know why the squad gave Adams such a tough time. He was like a spittoon for them, and into him they spat all the anger of their misery.

"Well, one night, feeling lower than usual, I happened to be sitting in the recreation hall. Adams was right opposite me. I got to thinking about him. I figured that he must be just about the loneliest guy I knew. Then it struck me that I was making an ass of myself. My little pile of misery, when placed against what he could expect, was like a minnow alongside a whale. About that time the new squad leader came in. That was Hervey. He walked over to where Adams was and started to talk to him. I remember seeing the look that came over the kid's face. I'd never seen anything like it before. It transformed him. All the loneliness had vanished. In its place was something holy. I imagined that the woman who kissed the hem of Christ's garment must have looked like that. I wanted to go and sit near them and eavesdrop. But as it was, it didn't matter, for Adams got up and walked to the piano. I knew then what they had been talking about. Hervey had bullied the kid into playing. There was a little trouble at first. The fellows resented Adams' trying to break into their gang. Tuthill made a fool of himself. I got a kick out of that. Well, when Adams did get to sit down on the piano stool, he was defying the whole room and he was very unhappy about it. But he'd made up his mind he was going to play—and, brother, did he play!"

Now, in the excitement of telling, he gripped Rosinski's arm.

"I've been to Constitution Hall in Washington and listened to recitals. Heard all kinds of famous pianists. But I'd never heard anything like that kid played. Perhaps it was the defiance in him. Perhaps he was just speaking to Hervey, and in his tragic, lonely way, endeavoring to tell the man what was in his twisted mind. Exactly what, I don't know. But I do know that while he played I left the room." Now slowly, tasting the mood of each word, living it all again. "Suddenly I was home. I was sitting on the porch looking between the cherry tree and the willow. I saw the rivers merging and becoming the

Chesapeake. I saw myself trying to walk on the water. I was reaching—reaching for that mysterious something. It was there. Closer than it had ever been before. Right at the tips of my fingers. I leaned over. I pushed my hand a little farther. And then, and then, unbelievably, I had it."

Rosinski sat up. "What was it?"

"I slowly opened my hand. I looked. I couldn't believe it."

Rosinski shouted, "Mother of God, what was it?"

Cailini looked deep into Rosinski's eyes as though he would see again what he had held in his hand that day so long ago.

"The Christ. That's what. The Christ. In my open sweating palm, the day before Calvary."

Rosinski's jaw fell open. Surprise filled his face, and then, as the surprise drained, he flushed with rage. He grabbed Cailini and raised his hand to strike.

"You son of a bitch," he raved. "If you're giving me some smart, fancy runaround, I'll—"

"Wait!" Cailini's voice rang with passion. "Of course He was there. But you knew that! Didn't you? knew all the time I was telling the story!"

Fiercely, breathing hard, their faces close, Rosinski shouted, "You're a liar, you're a liar, you're a liar! Only a saint—"

Cailini made a savage movement, caught Rosinski's lapels in his huge hands and began to shake him. "Saint, saint, saint, my fanny! Don't give me that tenth-rate pious shit. I'm a Catholic too. And I know all about that kind of crud. According to them, you may only see Christ after the Pope's given permission. Son of a bitch yourself! Don't liar me. Of course He was there."

Now, Rosinski was all American, as sneering and insulting to human dignity as only his nation can be. "As big as Tom Thumb, I suppose," he wisecracked, "and just about as cute."

Cailini dropped his hands. Suddenly weary, he said, "I should have kept my mouth shut—should have stuck to intuition."

After that, neither spoke for a while. The sneer was still in Rosinski's eyes, but, Cailini noticed, he did not move away. So he tried again.

"No, not in my hand the Flesh. Only sweat was there. Big bright drops. And somehow that sweat picked up the light of the sun and the water—getting all the time brighter and warmer—washing over me with its flooding tide—until at last I saw what I wanted to see—Him, symbol of man's eternal loneliness, Him, the only infinite victory over loneliness. All I saw was a reflection of what I wanted to be—an invitation

to give what's tender inside a chance to develop, a warning of what would happen if I tried, the way of all love, death."

The sneer left Rosinski. "I'm sorry. Forgive me." And by way of excuse and apology, "I'm dumb." Now he hesitated, stammered, "Are you sure it—it wasn't just imagination?"

"*Just* imagination?" echoed Cailini. "Of course it was *just* imagination. What else do you think Christ is? Imagination is the seed of all wisdom, the road through hell, the gate into heaven, yesterday and today and tomorrow. Imagination is man's only conquest of the universe. Sure it was *just* imagination."

A long pause, then, almost shyly, "You know—I guess—I saw Him once."

"When?"

Now, suddenly afraid for what he chose to call his masculinity, a make-believe of small embarrassment and halting, broken, tough-spoken speech. "A year ago. Back. New Guinea. Combat. Hand-to-hand stuff. Well, just as I was gonna bayonet some poor devil—"

"Go on," Cailini encouraged.

"Well—I caught sight of the Jap's face."

"Him?"

"I don't know—for sure. But, you know, I didn't—just couldn't—stick the guy."

"What did you do?"

"Ran like hell the other way."

They both laughed, and the embarrassment disappeared.

There was another long pause, then Rosinski asked, "This thing on the skyline? Did it teach you anything?"

"No; that's the awful part about it. Not 'teach' in the manner we learned at school. This only proved what was in you—something you should have known all along if you had only a bat brain!—sort of told that an ocean was a miserable puddle alongside man's eternity of possibility. It did give you a smoke-like idea of what to work for—but it certainly didn't show *how*."

"I guess that's up to the loneliness?"

"I guess so."

"Do you know anybody who's gotten something from the loneliness? Outside of torment, and more and thicker loneliness, I mean."

Cailini thought hard. "Hervey has it worse than anybody I know. And Lieutenant Voss de Lainy has it." Suddenly he looked at Rosinski. "Adams, of course. He interprets from it."

"When?"

"Every time he plays the piano. Every time he's near Hervey."

"What does he interpret?"

"I guess—beauty. Sure. What else?"

"And how about you?" asked Rosinski. "Can you when you write?"

"Sometimes. Not very often. But sometimes." Again Cailini looked at Rosinski. "And how about you?"

Rosinski thought for a long time. He spoke slowly when he answered. "I don't know."

Cailini shrewdly insisted, "Are you sure? Maybe in combat—? It works both ways you know."

"Funny you should say that."

"Why?"

"It's about the one time I feel free of loneliness. Feel like I've fed it and satisfied it. I used to feel it through other ways when I had my wife. Sometimes when we had friends in, no matter how much we liked them, after they'd gone we'd look at each other, not say a word, just *feel* that we were whole and together again. I had it then. And I used to get it when I looked at my kid. Especially when she began to grow and her body took shape—knowing that she was the two of us made one—that she'd done what we'd always tried to do. I wanted to do so much for my wife and kid. No, not in the sense of making money, not giving them a big house, an automobile, or anything like that. I wanted something greater for them. I guess happiness is what it was. A lot of things went into the making of that happiness though."

"Like—" suggested Cailini, "—having them feel that, come what may, you were a unity within the universe?"

"Something like that."

"Like having them aware of the unity?"

"Yes."

"Other things too. Having your kid know all about the dignity of love?"

"That's it."

"And the beauty you felt—having them quietly know it stemmed from you?"

"You've got it."

"—that you were a man, full and rich in your sex?"

"That's exactly it."

And again they fell silent, both pleased with what they had said. They smoked their cigarettes, toyed with their separate thoughts, lived again their memories.

Finally Cailini said. "You know, perhaps there is a law of loneliness, like those of gravitation and inertia."

"But if that were so, it couldn't skip some men."

"Are you sure it does skip them? The moon that pulls at the ocean will also move the water in a tumbler."

"Is that so?"

"Sure it's so."

Now hushed and awed, "That's wonderful. That's—why, that's mystical."

"I know."

"Like—almost like you're doomed to God."

"Or the devil."

"I'd forgotten about him." A laugh, then. "Wish he'd do the same for me."

"That's not likely."

"It sure ain't."

"Because I've got a suspicion he's that moon's pull—the beginning of God."

Now they fell completely silent, for in their present state of development, that was all they knew; and because the things they had said pleased them, they silently needed to repeat them again and again.

Robins and Rosinski, having drunk some Scotch, profusely thanked Hervey.

They asked if the rumor that the Japs were about to capitulate were true.

Hervey pointed toward the enemy and told them to figure it out for themselves.

They said, then the Emperor of Japan hadn't committed hara-kiri?

Hervey smiled, said, "Surely not again?"

They wanted to know if there was any hope of the company being relieved, any chance of hitting bivouac shortly.

He informed them that he had seen Lieutenant Voss de Lainy earlier, and he'd said that nothing had come through on that score.

But didn't the sergeant think it was about time they got relieved?

The sergeant goddam well did think it was about time.

And as Hervey crawled away, back to his own foxhole, he left Robins and Rosinski heaping choice and dire profanities upon Headquarters Staff.

11

A WHISPER reached Cailini's ears.

"Hey! Bob!"

"That you, Bill?"

"Yeah. I'm coming in."

There was a movement. Loosened earth tumbled into the watery hole, then he felt Hervey beside him.

Quietly he asked, "You make out all right?"

"Sure."

After a pause, "What now?"

"I don't know. It's kind of dark to set those booby traps."

"Sure is."

"Plenty dangerous in this ink."

"Think we'd better skip it for once?"

"I was wondering. Guess not. This is just the type of night for those bastards to come infiltrating."

"I was figuring that. Not that I'm superstitious, but if we set them, they probably won't come. And it is comforting to know the traps are out there."

"Okay," Hervey agreed. "Who's going to get the job?"

"I'll do it. You've done enough."

Picking up the grenades and mines previously prepared, he carefully inched himself out of the hole. He crawled a distance before beginning the delicate operation. Carefully he set the traps, under stones, onto vines. All the ingenuity he possessed went into the placing of those booby traps. When he had finished, they circled the hole. Now no one could enter, and no one could leave. This was an arrangement, a tacit thing, agreed upon by all Americans. Once night had descended, each man was on his own. When up front, no one was permitted to leave his foxhole. If he did so, it was at his own risk, the danger stemming from his own troops, for at night a body possessed no characteristics indicating its race. Infiltrating Jap or GI, no one knew. A body seen was a body to be shot at, unless previously warned that patrols were scheduled to return.

American cunning went into the manner in which the booby traps were concealed. A vine displaced to allow a man's passage, the weight of a creeping enemy upon a stone, a wire cut and its tautness slackened, all sufficed to detonate the

bomb, to warn the often unsuspecting GIs, and to kill the approaching Jap. The procedure was a line of defense against the fiendishly clever jungle combatant.

His job completed, Cailini whispered, "Bill?"

"Here!"

The sound was a clue, and he knew then in which direction the foxhole lay. With exacting care he returned.

Hervey asked, "Okay?"

"Yeah, thank God!" He expelled his breath in a long sigh of relief. "I hate that goddam job."

"You and me both. I know what you mean. It's bad enough when you have a little light, but in this, Christ!"

"When it's over, I'm always surprised one of the bastards didn't go off. I pinch myself to make sure it's the flesh of me and not the ghost."

"Here. Take a drink. Calm yourself."

"Much left?"

"Don't know for sure, but it feels like half a bottle."

"As much as that? Swell!" Lifting the bottle to his lips, he paused to say, "Guess the boys were pretty pleased?"

"They didn't refuse."

After they had drunk several shots, Cailini, his stomach warm and his tongue loose, said, "The squad would do anything for you."

"No more than they would do for anyone else."

Cailini made an impatient gesture. "You say that to save face. You know goddam well they would."

"That's merely your opinion."

"Observations aren't opinions."

"Tell me," asked Hervey, "does a little liquor always make you this loquacious?"

"I feel a talking jag coming on."

"That's fine. You can talk me to sleep. I hope my snores won't disturb your continuity."

"You tired?"

"Pretty tired."

"It's a wonder you aren't flat on your back. I wish you'd sleep more."

Hervey settled himself into one of the rear corners, attempted to find a position of comfort.

Cailini raised the bottle to his lips, swallowed, grimaced and passed it to Hervey who did the same.

"Anything new tonight?" Cailini asked.

"Not much."

Each night, whenever possible, they discussed the day's happenings—squad gossip, rumors, orders from HQ, the prospect

of a Japanese capitulation, the latest dirty stories, if any. Sometimes, when there was little current news, they grew reminiscent. They talked of what they would have done but for the intervention of the war, spoke of girls they had known, discussed the problems of their parents, shrugged vaguely over the prospects of the future.

Hervey said, "I took Lunagan off the AR team tonight."

"Why?"

"Son of a bitch was praying with his eyes closed while Tuthill was asleep."

"That's no crime."

"I know, but he burned me. Anyway, he should have come off long ago. It was stupid of me to have put him there in the first place."

"I suppose so. He's no good. He's dangerous to the rest of the squad."

"Every squad has a Lunagan."

"Why don't you have him sent down the line? We'd all be better off without him."

"That's something else I missed out on."

"What do you mean?"

"I tried that last time we were on bivouac."

"What happened?"

"This new CO—"

"That Regular Army bastard?"

"Yes. Mennen. Said there was going to be no weakness in his company. That all his men were—this will kill you!—warriors."

They laughed loudly.

"He's so much brass, that one, he should be in the limey army."

"Say that again," said Hervey. "But all the same, he's our baby from here on."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Stay out of the son of a bitch's way."

Cailini asked, "Anything else?"

"No." Hervey drank from the bottle. "Robins did say that the Scotch was almost as good as his Martha's elderberry brew."

Again they laughed.

"Robins is pretty lucky."

"Why?"

"Well," questioned Cailini, "don't you wish you had a Martha to go home to?"

"Never having had Martha, I wouldn't know."

"Come to think of it, I guess she's not my type either. Too sweet for me."

"What is your type?"

"Somebody I could slap once in a while. And how about you? Got anybody lined up to go home to?"

"No. Oh, like the average guy, I've shacked with a few, but no one I'd want to get hitched to."

"You're too choosey."

"Could be. In fact, I probably am." He fell silent, then abruptly said, "Too bad one can't make a composite woman."

"A composite woman?"

"Sure. Think of all the women you've known. What, about each, especially appealed to you? Then take those qualities and blend them. And there would be your ideal woman."

"There'd be a hell of a lot of spare parts strewn around."

"Wouldn't there though?"

"But what a woman!"

"How right you are."

"Here, genius, take a swig."

"You know," said Cailini, "I think I'm getting drunk."

"So soon?'

"You know me and liquor."

"Don't drink so fast. Nurse it awhile."

"But I feel like getting drunk tonight."

"Go ahead then. You won't have any trouble. Take the cork off the bottle and you're plastered."

Hervey moved, stared hard into the darkness and listened.

"Seems quiet enough," he said at last.

"Yeah."

"But you can't ever tell."

"No."

"Bastards might be crawling all over the place. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised. It's too damned quiet. The Japs aren't throwing a thing this way."

"I know, but we can't do any more than what we are doing."

"That's what hurts."

Hervey returned to his position against the rear wall.

Cailini, turning toward him and rocking slightly, said, "Bill."

"What?"

"I want to ask you something."

"Go ahead."

Twice Cailini opened his mouth to speak, then closed it.

"What is it?" Hervey demanded.

"I don't know whether I'm drunk enough to say."

"For God's sake! You sound like you're scared."

"I am."

Astonishment echoed in Hervey's voice. "Of me?"

"No, not of you. For you."

Hervey caught the note of urgency. He moved and stood beside Cailini. "What is it? Something bothering you?"

"Yes."

"You're worried!"

"Yes."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"What is it, Bob?"

Cailini turned away and stared into the darkness. His voice was almost inaudible.

"Bill."

"What?"

"Do something for me, will you?"

"Sure. Anything. But you know that. You don't have to ask."

"This is different."

"Spit it out."

"Well—" He hesitated, then it came with a rush. "Stop making the war something personal."

"What are you getting at?"

Almost aggressively, the pitch of his voice rising, Cailini said, "You know what I'm getting at."

"No, I don't. I wouldn't be asking if I did."

Cailini thought: You goddam liar! but he said, belligerently, "Why can't you get the GI attitude—that the war is a shit of a job, but one we can't get out of? So we do it, and the sooner it's done, the sooner we'll get home and try somehow to forget it. What I'm trying to say is, if guys die, okay. Nobody can do a goddam thing about it. Let them die. Let them get wounded. What matters is that we, up here, in our minds, don't get wounded or die."

His voice sank, now low and passionate, warning Hervey, begging Hervey to release him from the fear he was unable to bear alone any longer.

"Look what happened last Friday! When Gregory got his! We trapped and caught a Jap. Made him prisoner of war. And it wasn't one of those times when you can't take prisoners. This was different. But what did you do? You took out your knife. I know. You don't have to tell me. You were still seeing what was left of Gregory. So you knifed the Jap. Right in his belly. Killed him. Just like that. Slowly, Christ, I'll never forget the way that poor bastard screamed."

Hervey sneered, "That will make it tough when you write that book."

Cailini could have struck him for that. Not for the words he said, but for the profundity of the emotion in Hervey that could distill into contempt any living contrary to the reflexes of compassion and their inexorable death. Then, for one instant, Cailini's passion cleared and he was sure he knew how the Virgin felt when the dying Christ rebuked her for her cowardice. But again the fear closed over him. Cailini knew now his own soul was not strong enough to permit Hervey his approaching Calvary. For Cailini was sure that was what it would eventually be. Today's reflexes of compassion—the knifing of prisoners, never killing with his rifle when he could murder with his hands or his boots—might tomorrow perhaps mature to become the sublime thing of all, the courage of compassion.

Almost sobbing but forcing control, Cailini talked on. "I know why you kill prisoners. You're all wrought up. We all are. But we slack off. We've stopped thinking about the war in terms of war's meaning. And if you don't—I'm telling you now—you will destroy yourself."

Dourly Hervey said, "I can take care of myself."

"No, you can't. It's okay to be strong, but you can be so strong—as you are—that you're weak. Strength is weakness. And one day soon you're going to blow up—for keeps."

"Don't talk like a fool."

Cailini wanted to cry out: It isn't foolish. It's common sense. You can't win. You're not a god, you're only a man. And you're going to kill yourself if you don't stop acting like a god. Why, you're already doomed. The reflexes of compassion alone will drive you into insanity. And more, more. If you achieve the courage of this monster compassion, it's suicide. Already you're building your cross. And someday, somewhere, soon, you'll nail yourself upon it.

But Cailini could not say this, for deep in his heart he knew what a hypocrite he was. His tears for the dead Hervey would not be because the object of adoration had gone, but because he, Cailini, would be alone. Realizing this, Cailini knew what a phoney he had been when he had talked to Rosinski so long ago. For now, confronting him, stark and naked, was the fearsome *how* of the mystic skyline, the *way* to walk upon the water—and he was terror-stricken.

Cailini found himself returning in time to the first combat days of early horror, felt again its blessing of immunization, whispered once more the Satanic rosary—not like Hervey with whom the inoculation had not taken, not like Hervey who died a little each time one of his men died. The war for Hervey, Cailini knew, continued now as it had been in the beginning, a monstrous thing. The tenderness inside him had been mauled

so badly, he had broken the Commandments of Hervey. For this he had to pay, each day new and closer intimacy with delusion, until at last it seemed the alchemy of heaven had turned his blood into the venom of bitterness.

No, Cailini could not say these things, for he was only a disciple, and the war had not yet touched him with the pentecostal tongue of fire. Instead, he grew irritable, angry at Hervey because he, Cailini, was a phoney, was weak, and because, above all, he was terror-stricken.

And so, remembering Mercury and Prometheus, tasting his bitterness and anger, swallowing his guilt and cowardice, Cailini breathed hard and plunged again.

"Damn you! look what you've done to the squad. There's not a man in it who isn't dependent on you. Maybe that yellow-belly Lunagan is an exception, but outside of him, not a man. Yes, I know. That's including me. You dominate in the way followers have always wanted to be dominated. And they love it. In some uncanny way, you've raised the courage in the squad until it's risen above the balance of their guts. I don't know, but I always feel you've accomplished one of those movie cartoon tricks. The character walks along the edge of a cliff. Then, unaware of what he's doing, he walks over the edge —and keeps on walking. That's what the squad is doing. But, don't you see, the air is really you? God knows what would happen if you went. Then, when they looked down, they'd see the chasm."

Hervey continued to look over the forward wall, staring hard, saying nothing.

Cailini talked on.

"You put out. That's what they like. That something warm and personal. So they get a kick out of following you. If put to words, the squad would boast, 'Look at me, Sarge! I'm doing okay, aren't I? Just like you, Sarge.' And if you went, all that would collapse. That's what gets me so burned up. Through your everlasting putting out, you are denying them their growing pains. Damn it, man, stop making like Jesus Christ."

Then he was finished. The silence was abrupt, startling. He could say no more. He stood, shuddering with guilt, was awed and struck by his lack of love for Hervey, his obsession for himself, that he could leave so much unsaid, that his soul was so low he could not bear to see Hervey leave him to go walking on the water. Now he wondered why he had spoken at all, knew he had not fooled the listening universe, least of all Hervey. For he, above all, would sense the betrayal. Now Hervey and that universe would plot their revenge. They would

shake their feet over his head, shower him with the dust of contempt. It would be heaven's comedy. Cailini knew now they could not fail, for he, having betrayed, then despised, would whip himself until every pore in his tall thin body erupted love, and then, sobbing with fear, he would crawl—but it would be upon the water.

Cailini begged, "Give me that bottle. I want a drink. Let me get drunk."

Hervey wordlessly handed it over.

Cailini drank deep, then waited for Hervey to speak, expecting some lashing: "You miserable pimp! When will you grow up?" And a sad sneer: "God help you when you do."

But it was a long time before the quiet was broken. At last Hervey said, "Bob."

"What?"

Hervey nodded in the direction of the enemy, and there was love in his voice when he said, "Don't let those bastards get you."

Cailini bowed his head before the impact, felt two hot tears sting his eyes. Again he knew he had underestimated Hervey. Nothing could have been more clever—and fiendish—than that opening line of heaven's comedy.

Cailini tried to smile. After all, it was funny that nothing was more vicious than love; and this, in turn, making the courage in compassion, that mystical marriage of man and God, a laughing mocking rape.

12

IT was a dark and quiet night, so dark it had become ominous. The only noise was the stuttering of the machine guns, the occasional mortar and heavy artillery shells bursting in the enemy territory. That was the only sound, for the Japanese guns were strangely silent. As Hervey had said, it was too damned quiet. The surrounding terrain sprang startlingly into view as flares exploded, a muffled cough of explosion, providing men with the opportunity to comb the land ahead for a possible infiltrating enemy. Eyes looked into the illuminated spaces, tried vainly to penetrate the shadows. But because these flares could be heard, the enemy always *froze* before the dark was dispersed by light. No one saw a movement that could not be accounted for by nature. Immobile Japs looked like shot trees, stubby fingers of

stumps projecting from the earth. It was impossible to distinguish between the real thing and the camouflaged. Though the forward foliage seemed innocent of the enemy, a fear, sharp and nagging, struck at every GI in the vicinity. Too many similar nights had passed, apparently devoid of incident, but with the dawns came the knowledge of dozens of deaths—men silently murdered by ghost troops.

In the mornings when the news of the infiltrations circulated, men shook with terror. And when the new night descended, that terror was magnified a thousandfold. They did not dare sleep. The slightest sound sufficed to render them sick with apprehension. Men felt their necks, assuring themselves they were not yet slit from ear to ear. Sometimes, when the wind blew, it caught stray waste and drifted over the land. Withered stalks of grass would hit a man's exposed flesh. He would yelp and dart forward, crouch in the dark shadows of the foxhole, eyes popping, striving to penetrate the pitch. Nobody wanted a piano wire around his neck.

Then men grew trigger-happy. The barest movement and the lightest of sounds—wind in the foliage—and they, with wild abandon, tossed grenades and unleashed rains of rifle and machine-gun fire. Often, when there was no movement, just to play safe and feel secure, fire was poured in the direction of the enemy.

With each new morning, the circles under the men's eyes were darker, the bags more pouchy and defined. But with the coming of day, they shouted to each other, and in the timbre of their voices echoed a mighty relief. It was okay now. They were safe. Another period of grace was wrested from the monster.

It was too bad night had to come again. If they were compelled to speak, the words came tersely as though a chopping machine spasmodically loosed them.

Their relationships to each other grew strained. A mere hint of a slight was occasion for bitter quarreling. Morale dribbled to an all-time low while dissension soared high. Their control had been broken on the rack of suspense.

In the rear of the front lines where the hospitals stood, doctors had compiled descriptive phrases for this condition, and the phrases reverberated around the world, finding expression in the magazines and the newspapers and on the radio.

It was a strange paradox, and ever a source of savage frustration with the combat men, that the phrases when handled by editors became fanciful, even romantic. The people back home mouthed those phrases as often as possible. It was quite

an event when a stricken kinsman had one of them applied to him.

Hervey held the bottle of Scotch, lifted and shook it near his ear.

"Guess this is the last shot."

Rocking, Cailini said, "That's bad. But it was good. Plenty good."

"How do you feel?"

"Fine. Not drunk. Pleasantly warm."

"You're a liar. You're drunk."

"Well, maybe," he admitted. "It's a good feeling though. Smug and tired. I'm smug and tired enough not to care about the war any more." He almost pitched forward. "Bill, I think I'll write your Emmy. Mind?"

"Mind? Hell, no. She'll get a kick out of it."

"Fine. Do it first thing in the morning."

"Just watch how you word it. That new censor, Mennen, is a whore."

"You trust old Cailini." He began to wag his index finger. "He's your pal. Won't get you in any trouble. Old Cailini's a good son of a bitch. Known him all my life." Moving, he stubbed his toe against a stone and started to fall forward. Hervey put out his hands and caught him before he hit the wall.

"You know what, Bill?"

"What?"

"You're a gŏod son of a bitch too. The best son-of-a-bitching sergeant in this whole goddam Army. And I like you." He stuck out his hand. "Put it there, pal."

Solemnly they shook hands.

"I like you. Like you—like hell." His head began to droop. He was still muttering. "I like you. . . . Good son of a bitch . . . best son-of-a-bitching sergeant in this Army. . . . Best pal. . . . And old Cailini'll take care. . . ."

His head drooped lower. His mumble was now almost too low to hear. His breathing became deep and long. Half standing, half supported by Hervey, his long arms loosely dangling, he fell asleep. Almost immediately a soft snore began. He was, thought Hervey, as relaxed as a banana leaf.

Carefully he moved Cailini to a corner, then he rested himself against the rear wall. He stifled his yawns and tried hard to concentrate on something that would keep him awake, but with each yawn his vision blurred as the tears came to his eyes. Splashing the tepid mud-water over his face, he hoped it would bring some relief. All the bones in his body seemed to be functioning without oil, as though they had been scraped of

that which made them, long ago, a smooth and unaware part of him. Either that, or they had been dead for months and were slowly rotting, but still throbbing with the agony of ceaseless pain.

Wryly, from some dark recess of his mind, he figured that this was the closest he had come to being the living dead. What was the word? Then he remembered—zombie.

The foxhole to Hervey's immediate right was single and occupied by Zoole. Like Hervey, despite his earlier denial, he was tired, but unlike Hervey he had finally succumbed to the irresistible envelopment. Consequently he did not hear the crawling, approaching Jap. There was no sound. He did not see dextrous fingers unbait the booby traps. The fingers might as well have been invisible. All he did hear was a quietly repeated question.

"Hey, Joe?"

He turned in his sleep and his heavy breathing paused as he answered.

"Huh?"

Zoole never spoke again. He felt nothing as the knife was thrust easily into him. The wound was fatal, too deep for pain. He did not open his eyes before dying and he would never be tired again.

The Jap muttered and crawled away to find another American, who, he hoped, would also be sleeping.

Hervey's eyelids drooped and his head nodded forward. He never did know what woke him. Perhaps it was the strange animal sense that some humans possess. Perhaps it was nothing more remarkable than the sound of an exploding flare. But he did wake up. As his eyes opened, he saw by the harsh light of the parachuting flare a face suspended over his.

The Jap raised his knife, swung it down to strike. Only years of living at the core of danger saved Hervey. It had sharpened his co-ordination to animal speed and precision. He raised his arm, a swift impulsive movement that was executed before he realized what he had done. It blocked the death swing of the knife. It threw the weapon up, transferring the thrust to less vulnerable parts. Hervey felt a short, stinging burn in his shoulder. He reached up, caught the Jap's wrist and wrenched. The enemy grunted as he landed half in and half out of the foxhole. All the breath was knocked out of his body, and it required little effort for the powerful Hervey to force the knife hand down. He was about to plunge it into the yellow man's stomach when, abruptly, he stopped.

He remembered the words of Cailini. They seemed to come

at him from out of the darkness, something echoing hushed in the wind.

The Jap, marveling at his pause, wondering why the knife, its point pricking his navel, was not thrust forward, began to jibber and plead.

Holding him rigid as easily as he would have held a child, Hervey wondered. He couldn't let him go. He couldn't take him prisoner of war, for there was nothing in the foxhole with which to tie him up until such time as he could be sent down the line. And he itched to knife the yellow man. Hervey was torn between his desire and a loyalty to Cailini. He knew that if he knifed the Jap, it would be more than he could do to look into his partner's eyes in the morning. They would be filled with betrayal. And Hervey remembered he had to live with himself for the remainder of his life. Yet, on the other hand, it was not possible to take the enemy prisoner. He had to die.

Hervey slowly twisted the Jap's hand, heard the knife fall into the water. His fingers circled the man's throat. He tightened and squeezed.

Shouting a warning down the line, Hervey heard it repeated and passed on. Immediately the air become filled with a tremendous sound. A number of flares rocketed, flamed in the sky. Rifles and machine guns and mortars and heavy artillery shot vast quantities of lead into No Man's Land and beyond into the enemy territory.

The excitement had dispersed his fatigue, and Hervey laughed at Cailini, still inert and sleeping. According to all rules (civilian rules, that was), sleep under such conditions was impossible. But Cailini's snores continued to assail the air.

The night ebbed rapidly. As the earth speeded away from the dark empire, light suffused the eastern horizon and crept over the land. Men unbaited the booby traps, shouted to each other, happy that day was here again.

Even Cailini awoke. Seeing the twisted dead Jap, incredulity in his voice, he asked, "Where did he come from?"

Hervey vainly attempted to conceal his smile.

"We had a visitor last night. He dropped in on his way to meet honorable ancestors."

13

HERVEY removed the field dressing from his wound and looked at the bloody mess on his shoulder.

The aid-man looked also, made a noise with his tongue, began to wash the congealed blood away.

Hervey said, "It's not so bad."

The aid-man did not reply. Slowly, carefully, he re-dressed the wound.

When he had finished, Hervey lifted an inquiring face. "Well?"

"You'd better see the doc."

"Why?"

"So that he can send you to hospital."

"Are you crazy?"

"No crazier than any other son of a bitch around here, I guess."

"But why hospital?"

"Maybe you won't have to go to hospital. That's up to the doc. But I think you will."

"But why?"

"Because it might fester. And if it did, perhaps you'd lose your arm."

"I've never had blood poisoning in my life."

"Neither did thousands of other guys until they came over here." He pointed to Cailini's hand, indicating a sore. The scab was wet and the surrounding tissue inflamed. He asked, "How long have you had that?"

"About six weeks."

"And it hasn't healed yet?"

"That's right."

"Did you ever have blood poisoning back home?"

"No," said Cailini, adding, "And I haven't got it now."

"I can see that. But that's how it is on this bastard island. Six weeks and a little knuckle sore not healed yet. Now if you were put on a plane and sent home, that would heal in two or three days." He turned to Hervey. "Perhaps now you can see for yourself. Compare that small knuckle sore against the mess on your shoulder."

"But they're not going to put me on a plane and send me home."

"Hardly."

"So I may as well stay here. You can dress it each day, and if it should get any worse, then I'll go to hospital."

"If it gets any worse, it may be too late."

"But—"

"You'll see the doc. That's an order."

He began to inch his way out of the hole. Before he crawled away, he turned and said, "And just to make sure you do see the doc, I'm checking with Lieutenant Voss de Lainy."

Hervey opened his mouth, but before he could reply, the aid had delivered his parting and final shot.

"Christ, when will you guys learn that you can't beat the Army?"

He laughed maliciously and departed.

"Son of a bitch! *Goddam* son of a bitch! Christ, but that burns my ass."

Quietly Cailini answered, "A lot of guys would give their right arm to go to hospital to get away from this crap."

"And I'm going to give my left if I don't?"

"That's what it looks like."

Hervey began savagely to gather his equipment together. After he had stored his few belongings into his jungle pack, he found that he was unable to shoulder them. Impatiently he dropped them into the water, lifted his feet and trampled them into the squelching mud.

"What are you doing?" Cailini asked.

"I should be loaded down with that!"

"But you'll be needing them."

"Not where I'm going."

While speaking their eyes had met. Now the subject was exhausted, a thought leapt simultaneously into their minds, and immediately they turned from each other. It was as though each knew what the other wanted—and neither knew how to say it. So they stood apart, looking in opposite directions. But the leave-taking had to be said.

Cailini opened his mouth.

"If you meet a good-looking nurse, give a little shove for old Cailini, will you?"

"I'll do that, buddy. I'll even save that shove until the end."

"I'll appreciate that."

Then a silence fell over them. Both had the feeling that they had swum out of their depth, and they were not quite certain that they could make it back to shore.

"Maybe," said Hervey, still speaking lightly, "maybe I can talk the doctor out of this hospital jaunt."

"I don't know. I think that aid knew what he was talking about."

"Well, I can try."

"I wouldn't if I were you. Let them send you to hospital. You can use a break like that."

"I don't suppose I'll have any say in the matter."

"I suppose not."

Hervey looked swiftly at Cailini, then down at the brown water, shifted uneasily from one foot to another. He breathed deep before saying what had to be said.

"Funny, huh? Looks like we're going to be split."

"Yeah."

"We were lucky though. We stayed together a lot longer than most guys in this Army."

"We did at that."

"I often figure that the Army delights in separating buddies."

"I know what you mean."

"Stupid bastards. And they're always shooting off their mouths about the buddy-system. They figure they can say: That man there—he's your buddy."

"That's the American Army for you."

They paused again, and now the pause was sickening because it was so sharp.

Finally, Hervey said, "Well, Bob, take it easy, huh?"

"Sure."

"I'll drop you a line. Let you know how I'm making out."

"Do that."

Another silence.

At last, Hervey said, "I guess I'd better go."

"You'll have that aid up here if you don't."

"Yeah."

They shook hands, still taking care not to meet each other's eyes. The thick brown water and the mud seemed suddenly to have acquired a hypnotic fascination.

"So long, Bob."

"So long, Bill."

"All the best, huh?"

"Yeah. All the best."

Awkwardly Hervey climbed out of the hole, crawled on his good side, slowly, painfully.

And only then did Cailini turn and look at the departing figure. It grew smaller and smaller, and finally it disappeared around a bamboo clump.

BOOK TWO

1

WITH the departure of Hervey, the squad leadership had fallen automatically to Robins. Though a comparatively new replacement of six months, he had been raised to the rank of corporal and assistant squad leader because of his several abilities.

As Hervey, in talking it over with Voss de Lainy, had said, Robins had a most effective manner of throwing grenades, and the ASL was the team's grenadier. His manner was different from the Army's prescribed methods. But what the hell? This wasn't basic training. Nobody gave a damn here. Just so long as you got the things in.

Voss de Lainy agreed.

Perhaps it was because the man had played baseball. Anyway, he really could get them in. You should see him.

Voss de Lainy had cut in, somewhat dryly, and said that he probably would see.

It depended on where the grenade had to be thrown. Sometimes the throw was a blupper ball, sometimes a sinker, sometimes a slow, sometimes a fast curve. The guy was an artist at it.

Fine, what else did he have?

Well, he was no great shakes at being the brainy type, but he could think pretty fast when he had to. He had a co-ordination that got himself up, and helped get those who were with him up, and get all of them in some Jap position but fast and good and effectively. That was important in an assault. Especially in assault patrols when so much depended on the swiftness and surprise of the attacking team.

I'll say.

Now take Cailini. He was a good guy. A hell of a good guy. Best man in the squad. Though at the same time (and this was not being disloyal to Cailini—he himself would be the first to admit it), he always wanted time to think before he committed himself. That was not practical. While you were sitting and thinking, the Japs squared you in. Sure, Cailini was

the best man in the squad, though at the same time, next to Lunagan, the worst soldier they had.

Voss de Lainy understood perfectly. Anything else Robins had?

Wasn't that enough? Not even the Profile had that much!

Okay then. Robins was the new ASL.

Oh, and too, Robins was the only married man in the squad. Apparently his wife had a kid cooking. No doubt they could use the extra money.

Yes.

Robins was fairly well liked. No one would resent the promotion. What the hell? Nobody wanted the damn job anyway.

Fine. He'd tell the company clerk to put the order through. Robins, Joseph Larrimore, wasn't it? Well, anyway, the company clerk would know.

Robins could not have taken over the squad at a more crucial time. The day that Hervey went to hospital was the forty-third of continuous combat. Though they had fought through longer periods, they had never fought under the pressure they fought under now. For ten days they had not advanced an inch. Somewhere down the line a division was bottlenecked, and until such time as the opposition could be smashed, the whole line was stalemated and could not advance without immense danger to the campaign.

So they sat in their foxholes and waited, doing nothing but repulsing minor counterattacks and stopping everything the Japs threw at them. In addition, the monsoon had started, and for the past week the rain had not stopped except for aggravatingly brief periods.

They were fed-up and disgruntled, angry at the mud and the rain, mad at the bottlenecked division. There had been no mail distribution for a period longer than usual. They had suffered the worst setback ever. Curtis had shot himself. Gregory was machine-gunned in the last assault. Gruber had been disintegrated by a mortar shell. Zoole was stabbed by an infiltrating enemy. And Hervey (Hervey of all people!) had been shipped to hospital.

They felt deserted and alone, forgotten by all but the Jap. And he wouldn't forget. Oh, no! He wouldn't forget until every last son-of-a-bitching American lay where he belonged—six feet under.

They had grown to hate—hands beating the earth—these vacuums of war. The vacuums drove against their dearest wish —to end the war, the stupid, vulgar, blasted war. But there was nothing they could do about it; nothing but slosh around in their foxholes, chew gum, chain-smoke, kick the walls, strike

the walls with their knives—and sometimes their hands—fight each other, blaspheme God, curse their parents and the day of their conception, weep until there were no more tears left to weep.

Robins tried hard, terribly hard, because it was now that he remembered the child, it might be a son, and that would make him a father, a man, and remembering this, feeling some strange nameless force hitting him, he endeavored in the only way he knew (with a Methodist conscience and a wouldn't-ask-them-to-do-what-I-wouldn't-do-myself attitude) to pull them through.

Slowly the days piled up. Days of suspense and torment, days of loneliness and misery. Each hour a month, each day a year. Days when sluggish time seemed to carry all the mud of the Philippines on its back, so exacting was its progress.

The always dense humidity thickened. Cailini remembered his old simile—like swimming in an already dead sea. And the rain! Why, after the molasses humidity, the rain came as a wholesome relief. At first it was cool. They took their blouses off and let its stinging freshness bite their bodies. And then (oh, yes, there was always an "and then"), gradually it was not cool any more. They began to shiver and their teeth chattered. They put their soaking blouses back on, drew them close, wrapped the voluminous folds of their ponchos around them. Still the rain beat down, stomping on their helmets until they nearly screamed with frustration.

They took off their boots each day, skinned off their socks and looked at their feet. The skin was like a leper's skin, but flushed with the jaundice-like atabrine stain. After the prolonged immersion, the skin had wrinkled. Not like the wrinkles of age, but like the wrinkles of thousands of tiny sand dunes, and around each dune were capillary clefts, immaculately, unhealthily clean. Each day they looked, the jungle rot was a little worse. And if there were no jungle rot, there was athlete's foot.

They wailed complaints to the aid-men, vociferously demanded to know why they could not be sent to hospital. Always the answer was the same. A shrug, a "Sorry, Mac," and a "You know how it is?" Lastly, "If every Joe who had jungle rot or athlete's foot was sent to hospital, who do you think would be left to fight the war?" Sometimes, when the misery became too big to hold and the irritations became wrathful demands for an explanation, they were told, "Don't be a fool, Joe. Get back into your foxhole and shut up. Didn't you know? You're expendable. See?"

And they did shut up. They knew all about that little word

"expendable." It was the particular favorite of the Army. Yes, they knew all about being expendable, and they were quite prepared to bear with it. What they did not like was its glib usage, its easy implications. That tore at them. The magazines they read were full of the word. The newspaper editorials used it on every occasion. They went out of their way to use it.

Yes, every GI knew all about that little word; knew more about its potency, its limitless diameter, its deadly interpretation than Webster and all his aides would ever know.

It was as Cailini had once said to Hervey:

"What the hell! You can't take a man, democratically educated, and suddenly, brutally, punch him in the face with the brass-knuckled fist of totalitarianism by telling him he's expendable, that his life doesn't matter."

Hervey had looked swiftly at Cailini. His look was hard and searching. Slowly his lips had stretched back in a tight mocking line. "Don't say, 'you can't,' when it's already being done." He had added, "Sometimes you're so goddam dumb."

Then, quietly and unobtrusively, he had changed the subject.

The forty-fourth day of continuous combat. The forty-fifth day. The forty-sixth and forty-seventh and forty-eighth. On and on shuffled the endless procession.

Always the rains continued. The squad would gaze at the massed banks of thick, black clouds, groan aloud, then removing their helmets, wearily begin to bail out their holes.

The forty-ninth day. The fiftieth.

It seemed that time had halted. They swore to that, for they had ceased to measure it by minutes and hours and days and weeks. Out of the despair, a new unit of measure had come into being. Time now was measured by such things as wanting and not getting, by what happened to Zoole and Gruber and Gregory, and the closely knit possibility that it might and could happen to them. It was measured, not by months of past combat, but by the endless distance of future months. By the evaporation of hopes—that once remote hope of going home. By Martha's breasts and the last time her husband had kissed her nipples, by a Maryland skyline and the spleen of heaven. By a wife and child, long dead, and of wanting to be one with God; by an Ohio farm and alien feet, and the way a man-child had laughed—"such a kid he'd been"—how long ago?—nine, eight, seven, or maybe six months?—and because he would never laugh again. It was measured by dances and beer parties and the block gang and women; by the solid security of home, when you got down on your knees and entreated for things other than remaining alive for one more day; by a piano,

and more—a ridiculous prayer, a miracle asked—but most of all time was measured because a man had gone.

The fifty-first day. The fifty-second. Time dragging with anchored feet.

Cailini sat in his foxhole. His back leaned against the rear wall. His long legs stretched forward. The water, which had not been bailed out for several hours, was now up to his waist.

Tuthill had crawled by a few minutes earlier. Seeing Cailini, he had laughed and said, "First time I ever saw a man take a bath with his clothes on." Cailini ignored him. Then Tuthill had warned, "Hell, man, you'll catch pneumonia." As Cailini still did not reply, Tuthill had removed his helmet and leaning over the foxhole commenced to scoop. Only then did Cailini move. He turned his head, now looking at Tuthill. "Go away," he said.

Tuthill began to plead. "Look! You'll catch something, see? So let me scoop this stuff out."

"It's my water. Leave it alone. And for the last time, go away."

Tuthill was hurt. "Okay, okay. Catch something. See if I care." He had crawled away, still muttering, "That's what you get for being a buddy. Jesus! Well they can ram their YMCA stuff. Ram it. And they know where."

Cailini swore softly at the departing gunner. Tuthill's interruption had awakened him from a fantasy he had been dreaming. For some unknown crime, Cailini had been cast into slow motion and sent to wander over the earth, floating a few feet above the heads of people. The only beings who could see him were those whose hearts were heavy with pain and conscience, and Cailini's punishment was that he accept for himself all man's hurt. He could not deny them freedom into joy—did not want to deny them—for now, through some mystery of the sun, he was at last big with the courage of compassion.

The fantasy had reached a point where the total of guilt and pain was becoming overwhelming, and the real he, a watching inner being, held its breath, wondering, waiting to see if and how the Christ in the sun would rescue him.

Then Tuthill had come along.

Wearily Cailini stood up and slowly began to bail, hoping his sickness would not attack him as it had done so often these last few days.

He was sick now. For three days he had not kept a meal down. Any physical exertion would cause him fits of dizziness, and, holding onto the walls, he would see the land and trees and sky begin to spin around. It was as though the clammy

hand of death itself was placed over his mouth to stop his breathing.

After a few minutes, the attack would pass, leaving him weak and a taste in his mouth as though he had eaten his own puke. Then he would dip his helmet into the tepid water and sluice his head and neck and face.

Since Hervey had gone to hospital, Voss de Lainy and many of the squadders had come to his foxhole, to talk, to whittle away the day. Their gestures were brotherly, the only way they knew of helping him—to be permitted to share the deeper and more complex loneliness.

The loss of a buddy was the most poignant thing in war. One could take anything but that, and whether the loss was profound or sentimental, it left one naked and exposed. To buddy was to share, and to share tempered the mystical drive —to absolve and atone oneself in suicide. So in their flippant and casual way, they clung to their buddies, not knowing the warmth friendship shed was the fire of their only phoenix.

But Hervey was gone and he had taken his resurrecting fire with him. Now Cailini felt cold and sick. He was so hurt he was not hurt at all, only feeling a nothingness inside, a hollow, numb vacuum. The rare times he thought at all was to wonder: How big a phoney can I become? For Cailini knew the act of Hervey's going should have been his own hour of Pentecost. Out of sorrow should have sprung the tongue of fire, now memory and everything they had shared, a panacea for tomorrow, a light cutting and warming a space in the black, cold night of oneness.

So he was bitter at himself. Now his intellect whipped his emotion, and he winced each time the image of what he could be confronted the being he chose to remain—up there, beyond the heavy clouds, in the blue of the sky, Orpheus, throat bursting because he sang of sweet transcendency; down here, in the foxhole of slime and mud and dung, the preferred Cailini, his mouth gagging and vomit puking up.

After the spell passed, he sat down again.

He wished the war would end. He wished he could go home. He wished they would attack. He wished the order to bivouac would come through.

Anything at all but sitting in his foxhole trying not to think, wanting to grow up without the pain of growing, hoping to stop and roll backward the gathering momentum of art in Gethsemane.

But there was no escape. The artist is doomed. Whether he flees to the whorehouse, the gutter or the monastery, his mother or his lover, the spleen of heaven will rape him. Always

the artist is Alcmene, and through such God will beget Hercules.

Cailini sat and quietly wept.

2

ADAMS stared into the night and saw nothing. He was not particularly looking for Japs. It was Tuthill's lookout, and his turn to sleep, but he could not sleep. Too many doubts spun within his mind.

Without moving, he asked Tuthill, "Do you think Hervey will get evacuated?"

"Evacuated? Evacuated where?"

"Why, back home, of course."

Tuthill, who had been remembering a Washington blonde, was annoyed at Adams' inquiry and rather resented the implication behind the "of course." Silently he decided Adams should clean the gun for that. "Oh," he said, "I don't know. Shouldn't think so."

"But there is a chance?"

"I guess so. It's pretty easy to get poisoning here."

"I suppose so."

"I don't guess he'll get it though. 'Course, you know, he could get sent home for combat fatigue. He's been over here a long time. Though if he does get sent home, so should we. We all came over to this stinking hell together."

"He is pretty worn out."

"Aw, he takes things too much to heart. Goddamned if I do. I didn't start the miserable war. Don't see why I should carry it. All I'm worried about is how to get through it and get home. And, of course, how long it will take to wind up."

"The war doesn't look like it's going to 'wind up' for quite a while yet."

Tuthill expostulated, "Don't say that. Christ's sake!" He was a supreme optimist on the subject of war's cessation. For two years he had been saying, as he said now, "You can't ever tell. Maybe it'll wind up tomorrow."

Adams smiled in the darkness. "I hope so. For your sake, Tuthill, I hope so."

Tuthill knew Adams meant that. He figured that maybe he'd been a bit hasty about that gun. Maybe he'd help the kid some.

"I hope so too. Gee, wouldn't it be wonderful. Maybe we'd get home in time for my birthday. Say, that would be swell."

"Yes."

Adams remained quiet. He knew from experience that Tuthill was already on the boat and halfway to the United States. And now—now his folks were on the doorstep welcoming him. A big flag was flying from the window. The whole of Girard Street was out. A block sign read WELCOME HOME TO OUR HERO. There was backslapping and shouting and screaming. A mad throng rushed to shake his hand. Champagne was being distributed. Tuthill was passing out autographs to pretty girls with one hand and collecting their phone numbers with the other. Then he wasn't passing out autographs any more, he was smiling broadly and saying, with just the barest trace of patronage in his voice, "Tomorrow, girls. Come up and see me tomorrow." Now he was explaining his ribbons, giving some away as souvenirs. He was telling about the war. "It was like this, see? I was the LMG (that's Light Machine Gunner). There were Japs in front of us. There were Japs behind us. Everywhere Japs. They were getting closer every minute. It looked bad. Mighty bad. So I said to the lieutenant, hell, no, it was the major, so I said to him, 'Now look here, why don't you—' " Then, after a while, he'd sneak away from the party. He'd go to some girl's place. Let's see, who should he favor? Better make it Mary Lou, being as this was his first night home. She was sure, and on the first night he was in no mood to take a chance. There she'd be, waiting for him in her cute little apartment. She'd heard he was back in town, so she'd gotten right into bed—ready for him, all naked and pink and beautiful and raring to go. Her legs were spread and she shouted, "What are you waiting for, Moe? Come on, let's go!"

Adams had heard it a thousand times. He was glad that tonight Tuthill thought rather than spoke his fantastical homecoming. He wanted to think himself. Actually he did not mind Tuthill's eloquent line of bull very much. He did not mind because he knew how happy it made the man, and Adams liked seeing people happy. Tuthill's line, he knew, was Tuthill's personal and very special brand of beauty.

During the moments of Tuthill's remembrance, Adams was made to face the reality of his own pending homecoming. For at last he had come to believe that he would go home. He did not want to, and when the thought rose to taunt him he tried hard to thrust it to the back of his mind, or to envelop it by a frenzied grasping at other subjects. He kept repeating that he did not want to go home, but it looked as though he would. The months of combat had given him a feeling that he would leave the battle as he had entered, without scar, without any form of physical injury. The GI sequence of in-

vulnerability and vulnerability had been reversed with him. He laughed bitterly over that, raised his eyes and silently asked: Isn't anything normal and average with me? Other GIs, upon entering for overseas duty, had possessed an unshakable belief in their own invulnerability. It would be the other guy who got his. Always the other guy—poor devil! But after combat and subsequent baptism of fire, they had changed their emotions (not their minds—their emotions). Belief in the security of one's own invulnerability had disappeared, like smoke from a pine-wood fire disappearing on a windy day. Anybody could get his. Even themselves—poor devils!

With Adams, this had been reversed. He had watched the California shoreline grow smaller with only one regret. He would not see his mother again. And that had been drowned in the sea of his other emotion. It was as he had said to Hervey, that night so long ago:

"I've tried to figure it out, but I haven't gotten anywhere. Now I'm sick of trying. I'm sick and tired of trying." His voice had taken on a new note. "I'm glad there's a war on. . . . It's what I've been waiting for. . . . Soon now we'll all be in combat. I've got a hunch I won't come back. Then it will be over. At last there will be peace. And then nobody can hurt me any more."

So he had sailed, and only Hervey knew of his joy as he watched the California shoreline recede.

He had his wish. He was going overseas. He was an infantryman. And the war had barely started. He would have his chance. Plenty of chances. He had been so happy he could have danced on the deck. Now he'd prove himself to those bastards in that small northern Michigan town. Exactly what he was going to prove he did not quite know. But he was going to prove something. He was sure of that. And it was a fierce, glad, overwhelming surety.

Hervey had walked to where he stood. "Happy, kid?"

Adams had turned moist eyes to him, nodded, unable to speak.

"Got what you want, huh?"

Again the nod. He had wanted to lean forward and touch the man.

"You were decent, Sarge."

Adams looked at the deck, then, furtively, at Hervey, and back to the deck where his gaze remained, his right foot elaborately tracing a pattern over the planks.

"I mean—about that time the CO called me into his office. Said there'd been some talk around the outfit. Said he had to find out if there was any truth to it. Of course, I lied like

hell. Yet, I don't know. I didn't really lie. I've never done anything. And I told the CO I never had. I told him it was an idea the outfit had. That they had to pick on somebody. I told him he knew how it was. The guys were homesick and sore at being inducted, so they'd picked on me. Because I was the least able to put up a scrap, I guess. Or because they'd have more to pick on—sort of a big field—more chances for wisecracks. I told him there was nothing back of the talk. Gossip. Even that the guys sort of hoped I was like they said. And if I were, it would make something inside them glad."

His foot swung up a pitch lining and down another. When he had exhausted the arc of space his foot could swing, he began again.

"I told him that maybe some of the things I did, the way I moved my hands when I spoke, did seem a little bit—different, but there was nothing to it. It was just that I'd never gotten around with other fellows. I'd been brought up by my mother, and she was the only one I talked to at length, the one person I felt I knew. I hadn't made friends because I always felt shy with people. And I couldn't do any of the things most fellows did—like playing baseball and so on—on account of my hands. So if I seemed a little different, that was the reason. Nothing else. And I was glad I was in the Army, for maybe now I could get rid of those habits. I wanted to. And I figured the Army was the best place to do that. I told him I liked the Army. Especially since I'd started playing again. The fellows had been a lot different. They'd even started to like me. They hadn't called me by that name as much. I was sure that soon it would stop altogether. I told him I could handle myself. I'd handled Tuthill, and he was a pretty big guy. Much bigger than I. The CO sort of smiled then. He told me he could get me reassigned. To some entertainers' outfit. Said I'd still be in the Army, but in something I could excel in. I'd be among people I could talk music to. Wouldn't I like that? Didn't I think I'd be better off? The infantry was tough, and it would get a lot tougher once we got over to the other side. And what about my fingers then? I said I didn't care how tough it was, and I'd look after my hands. If they got knocked around, I didn't care. I'd fix them when it was all over. But I didn't want to go to an entertainers' outfit. I wanted to stay where I was. I liked it here. It was my one chance of making something of myself. Because if I went through the war in the infantry, I wouldn't ever be ashamed again. I'd be able to tell anyone who made an out-of-place remark where to head in, and if he got tough, I'd be able to handle whatever happened. Because in the infantry I'd learn all

that. I wouldn't learn it in an entertainers' outfit. He stared hard then. He said I would meet all kinds of people in the entertainers' outfit who were pretty big in the music world. Maybe they could help me after the war. Sort of launch me. Why, maybe I'd make a name for myself while I was with the Army. And wasn't that important? Getting your name established? I told him it sure was important, but not half as important as this other thing. The infantry was what I wanted. The infantry or nothing. Well, he said he'd think over what I'd said. He'd let me know. He dismissed me then. On my way out, as I went through the company clerk's office, the mail clerk said he had a letter for me. As I waited for him to find it, I overhead the CO tell the top-kick he wanted to see you. That's all I heard. And nothing happened for nearly a week. Then, one day, I happened to be on a KP. The CO came by. Seeing me, he stopped. He said, 'Oh, Adams, about that matter we were discussing the other day!' I said, 'Yes, sir?' I tell you, Sarge, I was scared. Then the CO said, 'Forget about it.' I couldn't take that in for a minute. He said, 'If it's the infantry you want, okay.' He walked away then. I felt so funny inside. Like, like I had to cry. So I stuck my head in the refrigerator that I was cleaning and worked like hell." Adams laughed softly. "I bet it was the best cleaning that refrigerator ever had."

Lifting his head, looking at Hervey, he said, "I don't know what you told the CO, but it must have been okay. You see, I'm here. I'm going overseas." His eyes returned to the deck and he mumbled, "I don't know how to thank you, Sarge. But I want you to know how I feel."

Neither of them spoke. Finally Adams turned. He had put out his hand and awkwardly touched the sergeant's sleeve. He had raised his eyes, and Hervey saw that for one brief second the bleakness had gone from them.

Adams had turned and, like a startled rabbit, had run down the ladder to the hold where he was quartered.

Tuthill wiped a smear of mud off the machine gun. He said, "Yeah, wouldn't it be swell if the war ended tomorrow?" His voice took on a note of excitement. "Why, hell, you never know, they might be signing the peace treaty right now."

"Yes. It would be swell."

"I can't wait to get home."

Home. Adams began to think about it. Going home. How soon?

Home. That was what they called that place where faces peered from behind curtains. They were ordinary enough faces, until you yourself began to look back at them as hard as

they had looked at you. And then you saw the hunger that lay in the eyes and betrayed the passive expressions of the faces.

Adams leaned against the mud wall and closed his eyes. It seemed as though he were already in his home town, even though his shoulders suddenly pressed against the wall and tried to hold his imagination back.

Up Maple Street. Around First Avenue. Past the Civil War Memorial. Down Bruce Street. The barest perceptible movement of a curtain. You had to be quick to catch it. You didn't see the faces, but you knew the bright hard eyes watched, missed no detail, picked at you as vultures pick on dead animals.

People would stop you on the street. They would say: Hello, back from the war, eh? They would be pleasant and make a great show out of welcoming home what they called "Our Heroes." Their smiles would be big and wide, their voices would echo with pleasure. But the eyes! They would lie as they had always done. Behind the mask, so much bright and calculating question.

I wonder? I wonder now? I wonder if the little son of a gun did?

And then they would look long at his lips, would muse again.

I wonder?

Adams put out his hand, and his thin, strong fingers lightly caressed the gun.

He heard Tuthill say, "I can't wait to get home. I just can't wait."

Tuthill said, "What's up, kid? Don't you feel like sleeping?"

"No."

"Don't feel tired?"

"I feel tired but I can't sleep. No sense in trying. I know I can't."

"Worried about something?"

"No."

"Perhaps you're too tired to sleep?"

"That's it, I guess."

"Wait till it's my turn to sleep. You'll feel tired then. That's how it always is."

"I guess so."

The gunner paused, now eying Adams, his fingers beginning a tattoo of impatience. Adams saw that tattoo and knew what it meant, but, suddenly stubborn, he refused to yield.

Tuthill insisted, "You sure you don't feel tired?"

"That's right."

The fingers increased the tempo.

"Not at all tired?"

Adams nodded, now exasperated. He knew Tuthill wanted to sleep himself, wanted him to take his watch as he had done so often in the past few days. Tuthill liked to have people do things for him.

Adams opened his mouth, said the first thing that hit his tongue. Anything to delay what he knew was really inevitable.

"You don't think Hervey will come back?"

Tuthill also was getting exasperated. He always became exasperated when he did not get what he wanted. Adams saw his eyes brighten; malignance darted from them.

"He's not hurt bad enough to get sent home, but—" here he began to pause on each word "—but they won't reassign him here."

Startled, Adams demanded, "Why?"

Tuthill waved a languid hand, a smile beginning deep within him. "You know the Army. They never do assign you where you want to be assigned. I bet you," Tuthill went on, observing Adams by the light of a flare, seeing his face wince, "they send him to some other outfit."

"They wouldn't do that."

Tuthill scoffed. "Wouldn't they now? Look what happened to Reinsburg when he got sent to hospital! Had the mumps! Did he get sent back here? Hell, no."

"Maybe—"Adams clutched at a straw. "Maybe he didn't want to come back here."

"Like hell!"

Watching his partner's face, seeing its lines tighten, Tuthill felt something powerful stir him. Each wince kindled within the gunner a new happiness. He began to feel his power. Tuthill was thinking: That feeling—it was a funny pleasure like when you'd beaten down a woman's resistance and you knew you were about to get what you started out to get. It was as good a feeling as the thing you fought for.

Tuthill liked the new sensation. He looked at Adams with fresh interest. He pushed his stomach against the forward wall.

"Listen, kid," he continued, slowly savoring each lash, "if you're waiting for Hervey, just don't hold your breath, see? It won't do you no good to hope. Maybe he'll come back, but I bet you a month's pay he don't."

Adams turned his face away. Nausea gripped him. He began to tremble.

"Go to sleep, Tuthill. I'll take your watch."

Tuthill laughed again. The kid trying to shut him up? Well, he'd have to try harder than that. He hadn't had this much fun in months.

He pressed his stomach harder against the wall.

"I don't feel sleepy."

Adams leaned back against the wall, tightly closed his eyes. He told himself he had to sleep, he must sleep. He had to blot out the sound of Tuthill's breathing.

There was something smothering about the smell and feel of Tuthill. It swirled all around Adams. He felt his scalp prick. He felt the sensation pour over his shoulders and down his back. It left him inadequate and panicky.

"I'll take your watch. Please go to sleep."

Tuthill rocked with silent laughter. He hugged himself with a secret anticipation. He was mighty and he let the mood of power move over him.

Very quietly, a menace in his voice, he said, "Hey, Adams."

"What?"

"Come here."

"What do you want?"

Now the laughter burst through his mouth. "Don't you know?"

Adams' breath came in quick, hard gasps. Almost inaudibly he managed to say, "No."

Tuthill said, "I want you, kid."

Now the panic, burning. "What do you want me for?"

"Come here and I'll show you."

Adams did not answer.

Then the gunner snarled, "Goddammit, you little bastard, come here when I tell you!"

Swift, stinging pains shot through Adams. And only with a tremendous effort did he manage to blurt out, "Shut up. You're filthy. And if you don't leave me alone, I'll hit you. I've done it before. You've still got a bald spot from the last time."

But his voice lacked conviction, lacked the force to carry the threat. He knew it. And he knew that he had not fooled Tuthill.

Tuthill spread his hands. His voice was soft with malice. "What are you talking about? What are you getting at? All I wanted you for was to tell you that you had to clean the gun tomorrow."

He laughed again.

"Adams, what did you think I meant?"

Tuthill closed his eyes, prepared for sleep. He had gone over and over the Adams incident of an hour past, frequently chuckling, hugging himself and swimming in the awareness of himself.

He began to think of his other conquests.

The gang back home said he had a way with women. Tuthill smiled at the memory. He had never told anyone of the how and why of that way.

You had to play women like you played fish. Sometimes easy, lightly, then, as you felt their resistance weaken, as you got under their skin, you pulled a little harder. At the right moment you moved in with everything you had. But you had to be careful. That's where the gang slipped up. They rushed things. Wanted to make Mecca the first night. Sure, you had to use persistence, but never force, unless it happened to be one of those times when you felt—that's it! the feel was what mattered—the situation required you to be tough. Some women liked you to be tough. Even the gang could make them. He, Tuthill, scorned such women, unless he was drunk. His meat was what the gang said could not be made. He took over where they left off. And he'd taken over at that point of disgust, often and often, and had succeeded. Sure, you played women. Acted the gentleman until they were sure you were safe. Then they got careless. So you moved in with your charm, sloshed the stuff around. You gave them the old corny line. You knew it stunk. But so what? It worked. How beautiful she was. She was the first woman you'd ever gotten serious with. Sure, you'd fooled around and played the market. But those other women!—Aw! She was the one. Because you had fooled around you knew she was the one. You told her of the house you'd build. But more than that, you got her to tell of the house she wanted, then you went ahead and planned it. Always for her. Always around her. Then you met her folks, went to work on her mother until the old bitch said, "That nice young man!" After that you left it to the old lady. She went to work for you. Prodded the girl. Said, "There aren't many nice, steady young men left. And you'd better watch out." Yeah, it was funny how contemptuous old ladies were of their daughters' allure. Then it was a walk-over. First time you were alone with her you moved in but good, necked as she'd never been necked before. She felt safe. You were "such a nice young man." You'd "do the right thing by her." She went a little too far. Or shouldn't you say, she let you go a little too far? Then, often, she couldn't hold back. Ah! If only you could get your hand down there! You told her you couldn't wait. You talked her voluptuousness up to the sky. And if she still resisted, you made it clear—in a nice way—you'd have to split. Because you just couldn't stand being around anything so lovely without getting it. You were a man. It wasn't your fault you reacted like a man. It was killing you. She was a woman, wasn't she? And if she were honest, she'd admit she felt the same. Well,

didn't she? Then what was she holding back for? After all, you were going to get married, even though it wasn't possible right away. What was that? She wanted a date set? Okay, then you went ahead and set it—way, way in the long-distant future. And as you did that you built up the feeling of security, made her confidence soar. Then, when the feeling was right, when you sensed that now was it, you moved in with everything you had. And mostly always you made Mecca.

You were such a "nice young man."

Tuthill glowed with purring-cat warmth. He felt good and strong. Good, not in the original sense of the word, but in the new connotation that was satisfaction and superiority and smugness and accomplishment and, above all, always the surging feel of power. He was Tuthill the Lover. He was Casanova and Don Juan and Romeo all rolled into one. He was Tuthill the Killer, the Irresistible. He was the power, the generator of lure and delight.

He moved his shoulders, rubbed them against the wall. He stretched his arms and tensed his legs. And all the time he was aware of himself, each movement he made and what he must look like to his imaginary watching audience.

Yes, Tuthill was quite pleased with Tuthill. He told himself he didn't have to repeat that he had something on the ball. He was a good guy to know. He was clever. He was going to do all right. When he got out of the Army, he'd get himself a cute little widow, one with gobs of dough. Then he'd lay back and take it easy. Enjoy all the good things in life. A penthouse in Washington. Maybe an apartment on Park Avenue, New York. Certainly a country place on the swank, exclusive Gibson Island. A suite of rooms in the best Miami hotel. He'd have all the clothes he wanted. He'd have cellars stacked high with liquor. He'd be popular. A playboy.

Tuthill stretched again.

He told himself he had been a fool in the old prewar days. He had wasted his talents on poverty-stricken government girls. He should have known better. A man like himself was a rare individual. God's gift to women. He should, and would, set a price on those talents of his.

After the war he'd do okay. All this GI talk about going to college was not for Tuthill. Tuthill was going to wake up. Tuthill was going to live. LIVE spelt in capitals ten miles high.

Tuthill laughed. Sure, he'd do okay. There were loads of hot, rich bitches around looking for what he had.

3

ADAMS was glad that Tuthill had finally fallen asleep. At last he felt safe. Before, he had been frightened, partly by what the man had said, but mostly by the way he had said it.

Hervey had been malicious too, but he had never directed his malice at Adams. There was a sharp distinction between the two.

Staring into the darkness, he wondered about that distinction.

Adams shifted uncomfortably, ashamed of himself. Now, looking at the sleeping man, he knew that as frightened as he had been, it was a compelling fear. And his shame was not at all a truthful thing. It was something he had built up, a little deliberately, a little unconsciously, within himself.

Adams could not understand that, and he asked himself why he should try so hard to lie to Adams—why he should have to defend Adams to Adams.

He flushed, again ashamed, but now at his stupidity.

Adams began to stare at Tuthill. He became agitated and conscience-stricken. He felt the guilt gnaw at him because he had been disloyal to his god. That Tuthill could move him as the sergeant moved him hurt. This new response was not unlike his need to touch Hervey's sleeve that day of embarkation.

Adams stared harder. There was something about Tuthill, something about the smell of the man, something insidious about his magnetism that was like a tangible hand inciting. It was there in Tuthill's darkly fair hair, it was in Tuthill's ripe and sensuous lips, in the expanse of his partially naked chest, his narrow hips and full buttocks, his rounded kneecaps, and especially was it in the exquisite brutality of his boot-clad feet.

Watching, Adams took in every detail of the man, and he was almost sick because the ferment in his loins was so strong. Now he knew it was not Tuthill he feared. He wished it were. He was sure he could handle Tuthill, but he was not at all sure he could handle himself. And it was he himself who must direct his movement, the decisive and ultimate moment.

It was now a physical effort to wrench his attention away. He saw nothing as he stared at the enemy-held territory, nothing but himself before God, asking, "Why?—why?—why?" All the passion of his genius demanded to know why he was

dead in life, why the greatest genius of all, man and woman together, was denied him. There was nothing but silence from Him. Adams told himself to remember Hervey. Hervey and the ugly compelling face, six feet of hard muscle, easy and fluent grace, the rhythm of music in flesh, unsentimental sympathy that helped in some indefinable way to bear your trouble.

But it did not help. Hervey was gone.

Adams was sure he would be alone forever now, and all of his insides seemed abruptly to have become a hollow pit. He felt it was pointless and stupid and a waste of breath to go on living. No one cared that he had a need to live; no one gave a damn about his soul. Beauty wasn't fashionable any more. And anyway, it cost too much. Who today had the time or the energy or the interest to share? What the people wanted was quickie stuff, and only then if it could be had without giving something other than the dollar.

Out of a life rich only in loneliness, Adams could not remember loneliness as acute as this. His heart seemed to be pumping embalming fluid all around his tired body. He was so tired there was no passion left in him to be bitter. He just stood, mute and stricken, now letting his tears flow, not even caring that he had been born in the most uncivilized age the world has ever known.

Adams turned and looked at Tuthill. He said: Why not be a whore? The world's a whore. You be one too. You might as well. The world couldn't despise you any more than it already does. They've been trying for years to make you a whore. So go ahead. Don't be frightened.

Adams took a step forward.

That's it, that's it. Now you're growing up, getting wise to the score, smart to the world. One more step. A little step. Go on, go on. Wake Tuthill up. Tell him what you want to do. He won't mind. (Tuthill mind? What a laugh that is!) He'll like you for it. He'll make you his buddy—so that until the end of the war the two of you can share the same foxhole. Well, what are you holding back for? There's nothing to be frightened of. The only fear that you need to be frightened of in this racket is not getting all that you want. Now you're not going to give me that beauty shit again, are you? Who do you think you're kidding? Save that for when you're an old man. But not now. Now you're young. So be like everybody else. For once in your whole goddam life be kind to yourself. Be a whore. Tuthill's a whore, a magnificent whore. And look how happy, how loved and liked Tuthill is. You can be that happy too. Leastways, you could be if you cut out this other

crap. What do you think that is anyway? I'll tell you. Spiritually kissing their asses, that's what. On your knees, knocking yourself out, for the applause of the whores, so that after fifty years of saying, "I'm not so low—am I? I've got a right to live too—haven't I?" they'll start to tolerate you—that is, if they feel like it. So go on, take that other step. Wake Tuthill up. You know how to wake him up. He's just what the doctor ordered. Young. Lusty. Raring to go. And he'll keep his mouth shut. Because it's going to be a long war.

Adams stared at Tuthill, his breath coming in short, quick gasps. He was not tired any more. He wanted to lean forward and feel Tuthill against himself.

But instead, he just stood and stared, hating himself and wishing he had courage.

It was dawn. Adams raised his eyes and looked at the glistening vegetation, so opulent and fresh after the night's heavy rain.

It was the fifty-fourth day of continuous combat.

He was tired. This was the fourth successive watch he had held, and the same number Tuthill had slept. His face sagged with fatigue. His eyes were lidded, almost closed. Tiny crow's-feet lines stretched away into his temples. His large forehead was creased. His movements, because of his body's stiffness, had lost all daintiness. His mouth twitched. At intervals one of his limbs, usually his right leg, would suddenly, uncontrollably, kick. He stared at objects. Then rapidly he would shift his gaze to some new point that might hold an enemy nest. Often, after he had moved his gaze, he would slowly realize he had seen nothing when he had stared at the previous object.

The dawn advanced through a dark screen of massed clouds, the type of morning, Adams thought suddenly, that looks impressive from the inside of a warm house.

Between yawns he washed his face in the mud-water and then combed his hair. He felt his large forehead, massaged it lightly, easing away the tight, sinus-like fatigue. He told himself, yet only half listening to what he said, that his forehead was not getting any larger. Unlike most of the squad, he was wearing unusually well. The onslaught of age, and even more, the onslaught of war, was evident only in the crow's-feet lines and the mouth tangents. These, and his eyes, alone told of his advancing years. His expression had lost its once perennial boyishness, its wonder and concern. What expression remained was mostly opaque, though at the same time, suspicious, appraising-in-summing-up. It was somewhat like the look in the eyes of Lunagan. Too, fatigue brought an age, but after sleep,

after washing and shaving, Adams knew that would disappear.

He told himself he had been lucky. And so had Tuthill, the one other squad member who had escaped. His face had lost its once rounded cherubic fat. War had smoothed that away, had sculptured a leanness that suggested strength. But it was an illusion, exposed when an observer looked intently and saw the loose, weak cast of his lips. They were not as chiseled as they should have been, not in accord with the hunger of the face. Apart from a small bald spot, almost hidden by his ear, and which would be hidden when he returned home and allowed his now short-cut hair to grow, Tuthill had lost none of his massed hair. His teeth were strong, immaculately white. His expressive eyes were rarely glazed by fatigue. His skin was not coarsely red or splotched. It was tanned, untouched by the jaundice-like atabrine veneer. The whole squad knew he rarely took the malaria-security pill. He had once, in a moment of drunken expansiveness, confided to Robins that he wanted to catch malaria; that it was a sure one-way ticket home. But he had not caught it, and because he was uniquely immune, the squad had laughed maliciously.

Adams began to think of the other squad members, and how they had aged. All of them. Even the Adonis, Rosinski.

The moods of Lunagan had become etched on his face. Fear was now ineradicably stamped—clefts above his brows, the muscles under his eyes, his nostrils that were always twitching, his lips stretching back so tautly, his dilated eyes and swiftly shifting vision. Upon no one in particular but everybody in general, he would throw that I-sure-put-one-over-on-you, you-son-of-a-bitch look. And when the tropical night began to envelop the land, bringing with it the knowledge that tonight might be an infiltration night, and your night to get yours, he would entreat:

"Dear, dear God . . . please . . . Almighty, all-powerful God . . . with whom no thing is impossible . . . please, dear God . . . save me . . . keep me safe from harm. . . . And I'll be good hereafter, God . . . if you save me tonight. . . . Hear me. . . . listen . . ."

The old lines were impressed again, cutting deeper, the new anxiety racing through him with gathering momentum.

Cailini had changed. His face had much of the haggard look that had been Hervey's. He spoke less, his eyes staring vacantly into space. His face, never fat, had become gaunt, throwing his high cheekbones into vivid prominence. A vein, running perpendicular from his right eyebrow to the spot where he parted his hair, had sprung into being. Its dull bluish tinge looked sick against the yellow of atabrine. The set of fatigue

was rarely absent, giving him a dissipated look, as though he were on a six months' drunk.

Adams thought of Hervey. Before he left, his hair had been stiff and wiry. Tuthill, once looking at it, laughed and called it nigger hair. The line had retreated, and now he had a ludicrous widow's peak, two thin triangles reaching back to points parallel with his ears. Adams remembered the time Hervey had watched Rosinski stare sadly at his own falling hair. Hervey had said, "If this keeps up, Rosie, we'll be first-class candidates for the bald-headed front row."

Feelingly Rosinski had answered. "Say that again."

"Another six months."

"Six months!" He shrugged. "Well, then you can call me the Egg."

"I'll be right with you, if I don't beat you to it."

Somewhat surprisingly, Polson had cut in. "I know something that will stop falling hair."

They had turned to him, too eager to heed the quiet whimsy that mocked them.

"What?" they asked in unison.

Gravely and simply he told them. "The earth."

Polson himself had quite an abundance of iron-gray. The squad had plagued him, calling him Old Man River and Father Time and Pop. He had taken the new banter as he had taken the old benevolent slams of being a farmer and a hick, smiling quietly and with good nature.

Zoole had once slapped him on his hard, oxlike back, merrily yelling, "What do you say there, Father Time?"

Polson had put his thick palm to his hair, had ruffled its already disordered state, and ponderously said, "Well, now—" and he had looked right at Hervey and Rosinski, who were both grinning, "well, now, it may be gray. But you know—" They had all leaned forward. When Polson spoke he conveyed a feeling to his listener that he was about to distribute a colossal truth, and if you missed it, sure enough, you were doomed to eternal ignorance. "But, you know, if it turns sky-blue-pink, I don't care, 'cause—" he paused for effect "—'cause I'll still have hair."

The squad had laughed uproariously. They shouted at Hervey and Rosinski, "I guess the old farmer told you two city bums."

Afterwards, he was still called Pop and Father Time and Old Man River, but no longer because of his hair. His unprecedented age (thirty-eight, ready any second now for senility), and the fact that he was, by many years, the squad's oldest member, warranted him his titles. No one ever mentioned

his hair again, unless to remind him that the day was Sunday, the day of the week he invariably combed it. He had, by that remark, stopped all anticipated cracks.

Robins was the one squad member who had thrived on Army fare. During his six months' stay with the squad, he had grown quite plump. This, combined with the well-known fact of his wife's pregnancy, drew much hilarious comment from the squad.

"You'd think it was him that was carrying the kid, wouldn't you?"

A smile played around Adams' lips as he stood and remembered, then, as he became conscious of the mud and the rain and his fatigue, the smile drained away.

Sure, he said, still staring at the enemy terrain, almost all of them had changed. They were old, some of them never having been young.

No one could live in steaming, malaria-infested jungles, no one could slosh around week after week in mud-water foxholes, and not grow old. No one could fight as they had fought, cutting and slashing with a knife, watching the sudden spurting of warm enemy blood on their hands, no one could kill wounded Japs who screamed or silently entreated for mercy, and not have it impressed on his face.

But there was nothing they could do about it, nothing but what they were doing now. Living slow miserable day after slow miserable day. Oozy, crappy mud. Eternal mud. Eternal rain. And the eternal Jap.

Adams raised his eyes and looked at the clouds. It was beginning to get light, and he wondered if he should disturb Tuthill, who was still sleeping, in order to tell him it was time for the booby traps to be unbaited.

Adams did not like to wake Tuthill. The gunner was never at his best when first disturbed. Too, Adams acutely remembered what had happened before Tuthill fell asleep. Doubtless some reference would be made to it. Yet, soon now, Voss de Lainy would come around, and the traps had to be unbaited before then. If they weren't, and if they didn't happen to see the lieutenant's approach in time to warn him—well, there would be no more lieutenant. Then, by the time the Army had finished with them, there would be no more Tuthill and Adams. You could be sure of that.

Adams began to kick the water around, hoping the sound would gently wake Tuthill. It did not. Surreptitiously he began to drop small stones in the gunner's lap, but the man slept on.

Adams swore, drew a deep breath, then easily, barely touching him, tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey! Tuthill!"

No response.

"Tuthill! Wake up!"

More tapping, a little harder.

"Wake up, Tuthill!"

Tuthill drew a long, quivering breath, moved, slightly opened his eyes.

"What's up?" he growled.

"Somebody's got to unbait the traps. It's getting late."

"Huh?"

Patiently Adams repeated, "The traps! Somebody's got to unbait them."

Instantly the gunner flared, "Goddammit, you stupid bastard! Unbait 'em yourself."

Having delivered his blast, he turned over, closed his eyes, endeavored to find a new position of comfort, still hotly muttering:

"For Christ's sake! The stupid idiot! Waking me up for that! You'd think he had no hands! For Christ's sake!" Then he half smiled to himself. "But I guess I told him. I'll say I told him."

Adams inched his way out of the hole, crawled to the traps and unbaited them. His strong, deft fingers accomplished the work quickly. The squad had frequently admired his rapidity and sureness in handling explosives, and Adams had grown to be proud of his hands. But look at them now, he smiled grimly. Though they were far superior to any squad member's hands, or any in the company, he knew their swiftness and surety had largely gone. Each new and rare time he happened to find a piano, in bivouac (property of some USO show), or perhaps in a bombed and abandoned house, he discovered that his dexterity was less, that his adroitness and precision had turned clumsy. His now stiffened fingers stumbled in the scintillating passages. But he did continue to play with the same surging intensity. And no one noticed any difference.

Looking up, he saw Polson.

The big farmer was in trouble. His hands, that were like hams, shook as he attempted the delicate operation of the booby traps.

Adams crawled to where he lay.

Looking at the man's stricken face, Adams felt absurdly like crying.

The big man put out his hand, gripped Adams' arm in his mighty squeeze.

"I keep seeing him," he said.

Adams wished he could think of something to say, some-

thing that would ease the brittle cold in the farmer's eyes. All he could think of, he told himself, was inane, but he said it.

"We've all got to go sometime, Polson."

"Such a kid Zoole was."

"I know."

"Why couldn't it have been me?"

"It will pass."

With his free hand Adams quickly unhooked the trap. That done, he breathed relief. Polson's arm had been dangerously close to the spring.

"Any more?"

"I keep seeing him."

"Any more traps?"

"It isn't right at all."

"Go back to your hole, Polson."

The man did not move, so Adams began to edge him forward, searched the ground ahead for traps as he did so, leading the farmer as a horse is led. He began to talk, quietly communicating more through tone than words. And when he couldn't think of anything further to say, he began again and repeated what he had said.

Finally he got Polson into his hole, but the agony remained in his eyes; he had heard nothing Adams had said. As Adams crawled away, he heard floating up to him from behind, "Such a kid—such a kid—"

Adams swiftly moved to Robins.

The new squad leader was worried. The fact plainly registered on his homely face, and when Robins was worried, he became waspish.

"I know all about Polson," he shouted at Adams. "You don't have to tell me. I know all about him."

Adams had never seen the earnest Methodist blaze like this before. He had been stung to shout, "Then if you know, why don't you do something about it?"

Robins slapped his forehead. "Jesus Christ!" He turned to Rosinski, pleading support. "I have. I talked to the guy. Two hours yesterday I talked to him. But did it do any good? Hell, no. I talked myself black in the face, and when I was all through, Polson just stared at me, said what he'd said before I began. 'I keep seeing him—all the time—such a kid.' " Robins wagged his finger in Adams' face. "I might just as well have saved my breath."

"What about the lieutenant?"

"He knows. I told him over a week ago."

"What did he say?"

Robins shrugged. "What can he say?"

"Didn't he talk to Polson?"

"Sure. Several times. He got as far as I did."

Adams thought for a moment, then said, "But something's got to be done."

That exasperated Robins. He glanced at Adams, and imitated his voice. "Something's got to be done." Now he snapped, "Okay. Suppose you tell us. You seem to know so goddam much."

Adams flushed, but still asked, "Why isn't he withdrawn?"

Robins threw up his hands. "Oh, you stupid son of a bitch!" Again he looked at Rosinski, his eyes imploring his support, but Rosinski turned away, quite embarrassed. "Have him withdrawn, huh?" Robins reiterated. "That would be something now. Hell, man, there are only seven of us left as it is. Take Polson away, and that would leave us at exactly half strength." He pleaded, "Have some sense, man. Have some sense."

But Adams insisted. "If he isn't withdrawn, he'll get his. I'm telling you now. I'm warning you. He's liable to go running for the whole Jap Army any minute. And I don't have to say how far he'd get. Perhaps twenty feet before God knows how many rifles and machine guns got him."

With biting sarcasm, Robins screamed back, "Go on! Go on! Now tell me something else I don't know. Tell me there's a war on! Tell me we're in the South Pacific! Your conversation is the most enlightening thing I've struck in years." He began to rave. "You stupid, ignorant bastard. I know. You don't have to tell me. You don't have to ram it down my throat. I know. Now shut up. Shut up before I get out of this hole and slap you."

Adams looked long and sorrowfully at the new squad leader. Then he turned and began to crawl slowly back to his own hole.

As he passed Cailini, the man called, "Hey! Kid!"

Adams looked up.

"Come here."

He moved close.

Cailini nodded toward Robins and said, "I heard him raving."

"You did?"

"Don't pay any attention to it. Forget it. He's all upset. He's probably biting his tongue off already. But, well, you've seen how it is. Everything seems to be getting out of control." (Adams, vividly remembering the previous night and Tuthill, nodded his head in emphatic agreement.) "He keeps thinking Hervey would have done better. He's reproaching himself. Sort of a guilt. So he takes it out on you."

"Yes. I guess that's it."

"Forget it."

"Sure."

When Adams reached his foxhole, he heard a familiar sound. Tuthill was emptying the contents of his bladder into their hole. In that moment he could have killed Tuthill. Instead he swore. Not with words. There were no words low enough. He swore with his emotion until it was all he could do to hold himself from bayoneting the man. And then the passion was gone, as the warmth from Cailini's words had gone. Only petulance remained.

Sure, he told himself, when you had to go you had to go. There was no truer truism. And sometimes you just had to do it in your own foxhole. But today, here, that was not so. There were two unoccupied holes, admirable latrines, not to mention the countless near-by shell holes. The practice of using those was rigidly adhered to by every other squad member, and he saw no just or logical reason why this son of a bitch couldn't follow suit.

Tuthill had no right to do it. It wasn't clean or sanitary or even civilized. It was intolerable. Yes, by Jesus, it was intolerable.

He clenched his fists.

Hell, he'd stood by and watched long enough. Now he was goddam well going to do something about it. The place was stunk-up until the next rain; then Tuthill would turn around and repeat the performance. And that wasn't all. Tuthill was mighty fond of having the hole bailed out. In fact, he was quite particular about the regularity of removing the water. He had loudly insisted it be done. And Adams had noticed, angrily and bitterly, that it was always his helmet that was used. Oh, yes, the big slob was plenty careful on that point. Now he couldn't wear his helmet without being sick at his stomach.

His eyes blazing, Adams moved forward.

It was then that Tuthill had turned. For some mysterious reason, his face was wreathed in a smile, beaming from ear to ear. If Tuthill saw the belligerence in Adams' face, he blandly chose to disregard it.

"Hiya, kid," he hailed. "What do you know this fine and beautiful morning?"

Adams looked at the sky. There was no sky, only formidable clouds. If possible, they looked blacker than usual, threatening to deluge the earth at any second.

"Boy, but I feel good." And Tuthill went so far as to inquire solicitously, "How are you, kid?"

Adams stared, his mouth open. It was, really, a miracle. Tuthill had awakened feeling good.

Abruptly Adams closed his mouth. He thought, if urinating in the foxhole would help Tuthill wake cheerfully, why, hell, he could stand there, his long legs spread, and pee day and night for all Adams cared.

So Adams eased himself into the hole and said nothing.

Tuthill's smile grew.

"Anything new?" he inquired, pointing his thumb in the general direction of the squad.

"Polson's in bad shape."

"No better at all?"

"Worse if anything."

"Say, that's bad."

"Yes."

"He was fond of Zoole. Looked out for the kid. You'd have thought he was the Greek's old man the way he used to carry on."

"I know."

"Tough."

"Yes."

"Why don't they withdraw him and send him down the line to hospital?"

"That's what I say, but—" A shrug completed the sentence.

"I wonder why."

"Robins said that would leave only six. Just half. And pretty near every other squad in the outfit has had it bad this time."

"But, hell, Polson's no damn good like he is. In the way, if you ask me. We'd be better off without him."

"Maybe he'll work through it."

"I bet you—" Tuthill shook his index finger, assuming the air of one about to reveal a great wisdom "—I bet you that goddam Mennen won't let him be sent down."

"The CO?"

"I don't mean no other son of a bitch. Sure. He won't let nobody go unless they're clean out of blood, or have both legs and arms shot off." Tuthill laughed as he thought of something else. "It's a wonder he lets guys die."

"He let Hervey go."

"Yeah. That's right. So he did now." He turned to Adams, an expression of bewilderment spreading over his face. "You know, that *is* funny. Damned funny."

"What's funny?"

"About Hervey and Mennen."

"What about them?"

Tuthill looked pityingly at Adams.

"Sometimes you're the dumbest bastard. Don't you ever open your eyes and look what's going on around here?"

Adams thought it discreet not to remind Tuthill that whatever knowledge he possessed was apparently new, and that he could not have done so much looking around himself. Instead, he said, "You tell me. You figure things out so well."

Tuthill graciously accepted that. "Well, I tell you now. Mennen didn't pester Hervey none. Not like he does the other squad leaders. He's always chewing their ass about something, but he always left Hervey alone."

"Hervey wouldn't have taken his crap."

"Hervey is a sergeant. A buck sergeant at that. The CO is a captain."

"If Mennen doesn't watch out, he's going to get his. The fact that he's new won't help either."

Tuthill stared scornfully. "New, my fanny. Mennen is Regular Army."

"He's new to combat."

"Then say what you mean. Sure, he's new to combat, and, like you say, if he don't watch out, if he don't wise up, he's going to get his. There's plenty of guys around here trigger-happy. They'd just as soon shoot a bastard American as they would a Jap. In fact, a hell of a lot sooner."

"It's been done before."

"But what I meant was, apart from that, why didn't Mennen chew Hervey's ass?"

"I don't know. Maybe he's scared."

"Don't talk like a fool. Mennen's so damn Army and brass and all that crap, he's got no fear. Hasn't got sense enough to be scared. I've watched him jump on guys bigger than Hervey."

"Well, I don't know what it was."

"Me neither. But I'm telling you, there was something mighty screwy about that setup."

"Well, it's beyond me."

"You know?" said Tuthill, his face twisted by lines of concentration.

"Know what?"

"I wonder what Hervey's old man is."

"I don't know."

"He never talks about his family, does he?"

"No."

"Say!" Tuthill exclaimed, "you and him got along pretty good. Didn't he ever tell you?"

"No."

Tuthill was suspicious. "Sure now?"

"Positive. I swear."

"Sounds funny to me."
"Maybe. But it's the truth."
"I bet you Cailini knows."
"I couldn't say."
"But he wouldn't ever let on."
"You can depend on that."
"I'd bet my bottom dollar that Hervey's old man had something to do with Mennen not chewing Hervey's ass."
"Could be."
"And that's why Hervey went to hospital."
"But I thought the medics sent you to hospital. What's it to do with the CO?"
"Aw, the goddam brass works hand-in-glove often."
"Like now?"
"Yeah, like now when things are bad."
"So old Polson will have to stick it out?"
"Looks like it."

Adams had lodged himself into a corner, and though he continued to talk with Tuthill, his eyes closed with increasing frequency. Often he punctuated his remarks with a yawn.

Tuthill looked at him, and for some reason, inexplicable to Adams, softly said, "Go to sleep, kid."

So Adams closed his eyes, quickly, before Tuthill could see the amazement that must be expressed there.

Tuthill was the most fickle of people, thought Adams. He could be a good guy, and usually was—when everything went his way. Then he became generous, charming, amiable; he loved the world, the traditional good-time Charley, wanting one and all to reflect his own expansiveness.

Discovering this, he had catered to Tuthill, had striven to extend that part of his multiple personality. It was the only way a dominated person could tolerate him, especially when living in mortal fear as he had done since the preceding night.

Adams knew now that it was Tuthill who was his enemy. He was an enemy more ruthless than the Jap. The Jap sought to destroy only his body. Tuthill might destroy his soul. He was a more formidable enemy than the Jap. For the Jap was over there, and Tuthill was here, right here.

Quietly, fearfully, like the feeling that comes after a stomach punch, he realized that the balance of destruction lay in the fragile strength of Tuthill's whim—Tuthill, the most fickle of individuals.

Adams barely opened his eyes, saw the lower half of the man; the narrow waist, the full buttocks, the rounded kneecaps, but most of all, the exciting brutality of those boot-clad feet.

4

CAILINI woke that morning from a dream. He dreamed that he was dead, and the whole squad, with the exception of Lunagan, were dead with him.

They were lying on couches of softest swan's-down. They were drinking beer from mugs of petrified cloud, and attended by heaven's loveliest angels. The sky rocked with the thunder of their laughter, and the lightning flashed with the sweet spontaneity of angels' smiles.

Cailini was having a marvelous time, and so were Hervey and Rosinski and Tuthill and Robins. The beer in the cloud mugs was never replenished by hands, for by some ingenious device they were never empty. As fast as the squad drank, the beer bubbled right back up to the brim.

One of the angels was Robins' Martha. He was ecstatic over the fact, kept repeating, somewhat fatuously, thought Cailini. "This is heaven, fellows." Tuthill too was having a heavenly time, though, ironically enough, touched by a shade of hell. He could not decide which angel was the loveliest, and which, consequently, was to have the privilege of being his bed partner that night.

Cailini drank in the scene with his eyes. His face was covered with an ear-to-ear smile. Looking at the squad, observing their play, nodding in agreement, a nod that was like an expression of permission, he felt a little like God. It seemed that he held the authority of what could and could not be done.

Then the dream moved. Banks of cloud swirled around, hid them from all but each other. When it passed, he saw that the couches of swan's-down, the beer and the mugs of petrified cloud had gone. And much worse. The ravishing angels had gone.

The lightning continued to split the skies and the thunder leapt after it, as though it would overtake its own source. Now it was ridiculous. Not at all like something in heaven.

Cailini felt suddenly embarrassed, angry before the absurdity. He felt hurt that such asininity should exist up here. . . . Up here of all places! And the cocksure way the thunder ran after its source was an insolent thing. Cailini opened his mouth, summoned the power of his voice. And he was shocked at his voice, his voice that was thunder. But it was too late to stop what he had started to say.

"You fool! You cannot catch the lightning!"

The thunder lashed its answer back.

"I can, I can. My name is Cailini."

And it ran on, still chasing its source.

The dream moved again.

Now the squad was in the center of a vast hall, so vast that the four walls were the four dimensions of the universe.

They looked and saw a woman walking toward them. She walked slowly, her hips swaying with a grace that was the flow of time.

Before her approach they knelt.

Cailini could not tear his gaze away. He could see her fully now, and one half of her being was black and mutilated.

Cailini's hair stood on end. He wanted to bless himself, something he had not done in months.

The woman stopped and surveyed them. She held her right hand in pious supplication, and with her left gestured obscenely.

"Who are you?" they asked.

She laughed, a laugh that invited and repelled, a laugh that was warm and cold, compassionate and brutal.

"Who am I?"

"Yes, who are you?"

And again she laughed her dreadful paradox.

"I am you."

And because they did not understand, she commanded, "Look at yourselves."

When they looked, they felt the impact of what she had said. They were beautiful and horrible to behold.

She shouted, "Look!" and pointed behind them.

They turned and saw a sign. On it was painted an arrow, and beneath were stenciled the words: WHAT'S COMING TO YOU. In turn, beneath that, was something that long ago had been a human face. Now its disembodied likeness grinned, a diabolical, I-told-you-so, what-are-you-going-to-do-now grin. All around the sign a thousand couples jitterbugged and raised shrill voices in an inane song.

The squad turned and ran, and the thousand dancing couples pursued them. Their breath came quick and hard as they ran up the skies and between the stars, running through day and night, on and on and on. Cailini thought his heart would burst. He was ready to drop, but still he ran, following in the wake of Hervey. They came to a sea of water. Cailini knew it was more of the monsoon, ready at any minute to be dropped on the Philippines. Hervey kept on running, and Cailini followed. Now Hervey ran on the water, but he, poor Cailini,

fell in. He yelled for Hervey to help him. Those crazy hordes were so close now. But Hervey was beyond hearing, and the thousand couples, still jitterbugging, still singing their inane song, closed about him. He began to fight, twisting and turning, and all the time falling deeper into the water. The dancing couples began to kick his head and embraced his chest so tightly he could not breathe.

Then, when he couldn't stand it a moment longer, when he abandoned himself to death and began to feel a healing serenity, he woke up.

5

SECOND Lieutenant Voss de Lainy said to Robins, "I'm afraid Polson doesn't seem any better."

"No, sir."

"Did you talk to him yesterday?"

"Over two hours, sir."

"Perhaps," said de Lainy, "perhaps if we put someone in with him—?"

"That might help."

But Robins said it in a way that showed he did not think it would help at all; however, if the lieutenant wanted to go ahead and try it—!

The tone was not lost on de Lainy, but he said nothing. He had been an officer long enough to know the value of playing dumb. He was uncomfortably sure that if he openly acknowledged Robins' implication and replied with the one question it raised, "Well, what do *you* suggest we do?" Robins was certain to answer quickly, and perhaps aggressively, "Send him down the line to hospital." And that, de Lainy dryly told himself, would be the beginning of embarrassment. He could not send Polson to hospital, and, above all, he could not say why. If he did say why, he knew the reason would incense Robins, would start a wave of indignant talk that would inevitably spread through the whole company. Men at war were very much opposed to having their innate sense of fairness and justice outraged. That could not be taken away. It had become their last possession, one cherished beyond measure, one guarded with terrible ferocity.

Voss de Lainy was not a thirty-day wonder any more. He was as good as his men. Twelve months of combat had been

a lifetime of schooling in common sense. So he no longer lightly dismissed their moods as something juvenile, and part of their maturing. Men died because an officer was lazy or arrogant; and de Lainy's obsession was to fight the enemy, not to assist him.

He knew of the crazy temperament of his men; how they were driven insane with rage because of some brass's insolence, how they had rushed at the enemy, now a little careless, not seeing because of the anger, and had died. It was then that he wondered who was the killer.

Now he watched the swing of these moods with what amounted to a maternal zealousness. And it was easy to determine their reaction. All he had to do was to exaggerate his own.

As he had lived through the procession of events, he had grown very close to his men. He had done that in spite of an early officers' training that advised remaining aloof—friendly, but removed from them. They had made that impossible, because, as Gertrude Stein had once said, "A rose is a rose is a rose," they were what they were what they were. Among the bigness, men full naked, their souls on their faces and in their actions.

Watching them, something new and wonderful had sprung within him. . . . And he wanted to share it with them.

He felt as though he must talk at great length to them, telling them that in war was a brotherhood. War was not all evil. There was something else. Something mysterious and fine and innocent and even noble. The wonder was that it was created by the hurt and despair they all suffered. It was here, right here, within themselves, binding them. Among the torn bodies and the infested minds came a miracle of apostolic tenacity.

He felt he must talk of this, making them feel it as he felt it. He wanted them to be moved by the mystery of the universe and its always inexplicable paradoxical law. He wanted them to be caught by it, and to be swept up until they were soaring in the realization of war's kinship, war's living nobility.

He must have them know this, because one day the war would be over and it would be gone. Then they would never know how close to the hearts of men they had come; they would never know that within their grasp had been the answer to all the suffering of humanity.

They would go home, and life again would become the *daily round and common task*. It would be beset with the petty problems and emotions that exacted every moment of time, every thought of the mind.

Was the boss being smart when he made that last remark?

What movie to see? What radio program to listen to? Shall I work overtime and buy a new car? How can I get the foreman's job?

Yes, they would go home from the Philippines, or Japan, or wherever they happened to be at the war's end. They would resume their old jobs or get new ones. They would return different men, but soon, they would be rebaptized in the old monotonous industrial fever. They would know again the humdrum of civilization, the perpetual grinding sameness. They would slowly become what they had been when they left.

Yet, there would be times when they would pause, when they would wonder what insidious force was tugging at them. They would halt, amazed by the sudden and swift surges of dissatisfaction. They would infrequently be swept by an elusive but implacable loneliness. Now and again they would grow angry before the subtle insistence. They would feel that they had lost something, but they would never know exactly what. So they would shout at their wives, slap their children, tell their folks to go to hell. They would go out and get drunk. The people around would shrug, spread their hands, apologize and say something like, "The war. You know." Then everybody would nod their heads in what they fondly believed was understanding.

Yes, they would go home, and Voss de Lainy was sure they would never know how close they had been to what all mankind wanted.

And he wanted them to know, wanted them to know now, while they were living the miracle, that they might feel themselves touched by the magic of inexpressible mystery.

He wanted to tell them so badly that at times he felt he would burst. And yet he knew, with sadness, he would never tell them. Things like that cannot be told. They must be felt, discovered; they must spring from within yourself.

Slowly Voss de Lainy lifted his head. He saw Robins staring at him, his face unusually red, his lips tight with hostility. Without thinking, Voss de Lainy knew it was best to play dumb again. He would not ask, "What would you do, Corporal?" The question was dynamite. Yet he knew that Hervey would also have stared aggressively, his chin stuck out and an ugly light in his eyes. But then, Hervey was adroit; his brutality would have struck at the source. The sergent himself would have told him what and where and how and who was at fault. The difference was that Hervey would have kept his mouth shut. He was a man. He did not need the support of other men's backing. Perhaps he would have told Cailini, but that was as far as it would have gone. The sergeant would have

started no chain of vicious and burning hatred that might somehow result in the CO being shot by one of his own men. He would not endanger de Lainy's already precarious position in the matter of defending a stupid superior officer. For like himself, Hervey had been acutely aware of the moods of men, the highly explosive quality of their anger and resulting consequences.

Hervey, his eyes leveled at him, would have said, "Mennen, huh?"

De Lainy would have nodded.

Then, when the sergeant swore, "That son of a bitch!" he would have nodded again.

That was all that would have been said, but an immense amount of communication would have passed between them. Instantly their sympathies would have met, an alliance formed, two brains working to outwit the CO. And somehow, through some devious back channel, the situation would have been met and handled.

Then de Lainy could forget what had happened last night when he warned the CO of Polson's condition. Then he could laugh at the reply Mennen had shouted:

"I'll have no yellow-bellies in my command escaping their duty under the disguise of being psychopathic!"

De Lainy missed Hervey, and he missed the always imminent shadow of Hervey's father who hovered so formidably and warmly fraternal in the close background.

He said to Robins, "There are seven of you left." He had taken care not to say., "You've lost five men."

As it was, Robins answered hotly, "Yes, seven." His voice was bitter. He deliberately omitted the *sir.*

Voss de Lainy quickly raised his eyes. It was not that he minded the omission, because in combat he never demanded it. There were other signs of knowing you had prestige, like knowing they did not lie. But because Robins had previously chosen the term as a method of his personal respect, de Lainy looked hard at the man.

He saw behind the corporal's defiance great unhappiness. It was mirrored in his eyes, his creased brow, the hard set of his clenched teeth. De Lainy suddenly thought of a plump, red-faced little boy standing before his schoolmaster. He held the defiance to check the tears, because he had been told it was not manly to cry. And the little boy knew he'd done wrong, but he wasn't going to admit it until you had spoken softly to him, until he knew you were not going to punish. He expected you to be stern, but he was afraid you'd be brutal.

De Lainy could have said, "Now suppose you tell me what's

wrong." But he knew that would produce nothing more than a stammering, inadequate account that was in itself an apology. The last thing he wanted was that Robins look a fool in his own eyes.

Instead, gently and quietly, he said, "I know. I understand. You're worried because everything seems to be getting out of hand. You figure this Polson thing would not have happened if Hervey were here. That puts you on a spot. You see, you've been measuring yourself, using Hervey as a yardstick." De Lainy suddenly grinned. "Some yardstick!"

Because the officer's grin was big and friendly, Robins, in spite of his determination to remain indignant, felt the hard set of his face loosen.

"But you're not really being fair to yourself. You haven't given yourself a chance. Now if somebody else allowed you the same scanty chance you are allowing yourself, you'd be plenty good and mad." De Lainy made a gesture with his hand. It was as though the problem lay in his open palm. "Sure, I'm not denying Hervey would have done a better job." He saw the man wince. "But, hell, Hervey's had a damn sight more practice at this kind of thing than you have. Hervey was over here fighting the war when you were still a year from finishing school." Some of the frown left the corporal's face. "It isn't your fault we're not on bivouac. God knows that in the condition we're in, we should have gone days ago. And it isn't your fault the men are mad at the monsoon. You didn't start it—" adding sharply, "—did you?"

Startled, Robins said, "No," and before he realized that he had spoken, he had added, "sir."

"It isn't your fault replacements haven't come through. You didn't cause the division to get bottlenecked and hold us up—did you?"

Robins shook his head.

"I don't dispute that it was your fault in causing your wife to get pregnant and consequently making a load of worry for yourself." He grinned again. "Wasn't that your fault?"

Robins answered with a grin. "Yes, sir."

"Well, let's hope so."

And seeing that grin, Voss de Lainy knew he could now ask, "Okay, suppose you tell me what's bothering you."

"Well, sir, the squad seem to sort of resent me." He added hurriedly, "They haven't said anything, but I feel it."

"They don't resent you, Robins. They resent the monsoon, the mud, the hold-up, the sense that they're getting no place, and that the war's going to drag out indefinitely. They're mad because no mail has come through. They're sick of K rations.

They want and need to go to a rest area. They're afraid because five men have gone. They're fed up. They keep telling themselves they can't take it any longer, but it doesn't do them any good. They have to continue to take it. Don't you see, they're mad at all this? They're resenting it just as you are resenting the fact that you can't be home with your wife when she needs you more than she's ever needed you."

"I sort of figured that, but, well, somehow—"

"What, Robins?"

Then it came with a rush. "Sir, don't you think Cailini would make a better squad leader?"

De Lainy was struck, as he had so often been struck since he was assigned to the platoon, by the integrity of men in war. The cheap pettiness of civilian life, the fawning to be top-dog, the strut and insolence of the foreman, were so markedly absent. Combat had destroyed that. And war, with its struggle, its savagery and ruthlessness, had created greatness in men. Men had become *human* beings. They had lost their boasting I've-lived-next-door-to-my-neighbor-for-fifteen-years-and-I-don't-know-who-he-is-and-I-don't-give-a-damn attitude. They were no longer just one of the masses casually, brutally living a life apart. They were needed and wanted, and, if they went where many had already gone, they were missed.

De Lainy wondered about that, then he marveled. And he threw up his hands in despair when he remembered that it had taken a war to bring it about, and, ironically, it would take a peace to smash it.

Robins had taken advantage of the pause to explain hurriedly, "You see, sir, Cailini's been here with the squad for a long time. He's an original member, not a replacement like me. And they don't—" He was about to say "resent," stopped, tried to think of another word and could not. He continued, rushing past the slip. "They know him so well. They almost feel the same about him as they did about Hervey. He gets along with them. It's because he understands them, I guess. He can play up to them, kid them along. He talks their kind of language." Robins pleaded, "He's a much better guy for this job than I am, sir."

De Lainy wanted to wring Robins' hand. They were words without intrigue. It was not that he wanted merely to get rid of the damn job. He honestly believed Cailini to be the better man and was altruistic enough to admit it at the expense of his masculinity.

"Perhaps," said de Lainy, for once speaking with equal honesty, "perhaps you're right. But I think you're only right up to a point." He began to emphasize his words. "If I thought we

were going to be stuck in these goddam mud holes for the remainder of the war, I'd follow your suggestion, and I do believe the squad would be better off. But we're not. Any hour now that division is going to break the bottleneck. Then we'll move forward. But the point is this—and listen now. When we do advance, you'll come into your own. You're a good man in assault. You think fast. You move fast. You get yourself in there, punching hard. And you get those with you in there. Sure, a squad leader takes his orders from me, and I take my orders from Captain Mennen, who takes his orders from the major, and so on up. But often, in the confusion and the noise, when you temporarily lose contact, you're strictly on your own. Sometimes it doesn't matter, and sometimes it does. A whole platoon has been known to be wiped out because a squad leader was bad, because he couldn't think, couldn't take the initiative. The infantry functions, good or bad, according to its squad leaders. And I think it's reasonably truthful to say that the squad leaders are the infantry." He smiled. "And the lieutenants—second lieutenants, that is—also."

Robins grinned in reply.

"There's no better man in this squad than you when it comes to assault. I know that. And Hervey said so too. It was he who wanted you to be the assistant."

Robins flushed with pride, and de Lainy paused, allowing him to ride his embarrassment, squeezing the maximum effect from it.

Now he could return to the matter of Polson.

"I'll send a man over from the second squad. He can share a hole with Polson." He added glibly, "Polson will snap out of it."

"Yes, sir."

"Is there anything else?"

"No. I don't think so."

"All right then." He started to back away. "Remember what I told you."

"Yes, sir."

6

CAILINI kicked the forward wall of his hole. It was a hard kick, and he hurt himself. He swore explosively.

Suddenly he had to talk. Before he realized what he was

doing, he was out of the hole and crawling rapidly toward Robins.

Robins said, "Sure. Move if you want to. It's okay by me. But what's the matter?"

"I get lonesome."

"But I thought you liked to be alone? I'd have asked you before, but I thought you liked it your way."

"I do like to be alone. But not all the time. Besides, the nights are too long. I find myself dozing off. And you know what happened to Zoole?"

"Sure."

"This way, being with someone, I won't have to do all my sleeping in the day."

"It's hard to sleep in the day. Too many interruptions. Rations, water, ammo and so on."

"When you're on your own, it is."

"Well, go ahead."

"Who shall I move in with?'

"Gee! Now wait a minute. Let's see. Polson and Lunagan are the only two single holes left. And somebody from number two is coming to move in with Polson. Sorry, but it'll have to be Lunagan."

Cailini frowned. "Nobody else, huh?"

" 'Fraid not."

"Hell!" Cailini started to leave.

"You going in with Lunagan?" Robins called after him.

"I guess so."

"Okay, then."

Lunagan had smiled a big welcome, flashed his unusually small teeth. His always bright eyes lit with pleasure. Eagerly he moved his few belongings over to the far side.

"Sure, sure. Move right in. Glad to have you."

Lunagan could have hugged Cailini. Several times since Hervey had gone, he had toyed with the idea of asking him to share his foxhole. Each time he had dismissed the thought, knowing it to be nothing more than a wild hope. Now this! To have Cailini come to him!

Lunagan's smile grew bigger. He saw an end to his isolation.

"I thought you wanted to be alone. I'm sorry now I didn't ask you after Hervey went. Why, we lost out on several days."

A sudden chill struck Cailini. He turned his head away. Lunagan, whose feverish eyes missed nothing, also saw, but he continued to talk, his words coming a little faster.

"I know how you feel. I get lonesome myself. It's awful sitting in a foxhole day after day, all by yoursef, doing nothing

but thinking. After a while you don't have anything left to think about." He looked imploringly at Cailini's withdrawn face. "You know, I hardly ever have anyone with me. When we have a full squad, yes. But you know how little we have a full squad."

Cailini answered sharply, "You had company when you were with Tuthill. You should have held on to that."

"I wasn't the second AR for long."

"That was your fault."

Then Cailini knew why he had left his own foxhole, knew why he wanted the company of another man. He felt glad as Lunagan rambled on.

"I can't help being afraid. I've always been afraid of violence. It does something to me. Makes me freeze inside. It's some kind of nausea I can't control. Seems to stick in my throat. I start to shake. My heart stops, and then, all of a sudden, it beats so fast."

He put his hand on Cailini's sleeve, his eyes begged for understanding and sympathy.

Cailini shook his hand off.

"Don't tell me," he sneered. "Go and weep on the padre's shoulder. That's what the Army's paying him for."

"But it's true."

"Hell, man, you don't try to control your fear."

"I have. I have tried."

"What about us? Don't you think we get scared? Sure, we do."

"You're different. You can discipline it."

"We don't cater to it, if that's what you mean."

"Cater to it?"

"That's what I said. Cater to it. You do it all the time." Now Cailini faced him. "Supposing we had more guys like you! What would happen to the outfit if half the fellows crawled into shell holes or brought up the rear like you do? Hell, they'd be wiped out. And so would you who hid. Once the Japs had smashed the drive, they'd counterattack, and then God help all people hiding in shell holes."

"You don't understand."

Lunagan wished fervently the subject could be by-passed. He had started to talk, hoping only for some sort of comradely exchange. Somehow it had got out of hand, and he had no idea how to get it back. At the same time, he realized that, now he was under discussion, the subject must be pursued to its end.

"If you did understand," he pleaded, "you'd know how impossible it is for me to discipline myself."

Impatiently Cailini cut in. "Stop saying that." He paused before adding, "It isn't altogether your fear that gets the guys."

"What is it?"

Cailini became embarrassed. He also wished now that they had steered clear of the subject.

"What is it?" Lunagan persisted.

Cailini hesitated. "Well, it's—"

"What?"

"Jesus Christ! You must know the fellows have heard you pray."

"What's wrong with that?"

"If you prayed for them once in a while, they might feel differently toward you."

Eagerly Lunagan asked, "You think so?"

Cailini stared at him. His purpose was so obviously framed that Cailini became a little sick.

"No," he muttered, disgusted, "that wouldn't help."

"But you just said—"

"Aw, you're so goddam obvious. They'd know you were kissing their asses."

Lunagan protested at once. "But I like the squad. If I do what you just said, it's because I'd like to be friends with them."

"You don't like anybody but Henry Lunagan. I've watched you too often. And so has the squad."

"What have you seen?"

Instantly Lunagan knew he should not have asked that.

"You really want to know?" Cailini asked, leaning forward.

Lunagan hesitated when he saw the eager look in Cailini's eyes. He did not want to know at all, yet he knew if he retracted now, it would seal Cailini's contempt.

Slowly and quietly, he said, "Yes, I want to know."

Equally slowly and twice as quietly, Cailini replied.

"I've seen a man crazy about himself, someone determined to escape the war regardless of whom he expends. The tragedy of the death that saved Lunagan does not move Lunagan. A little arrogantly something inside this man nods a, 'Well, that's how it should be.' I've watched him pass through countless soul-striking experiences and yet come out of them without soul scars. His adoration of himself seems to be an impregnable fortress. I've seen the audacity of his fear. Not a fear of annihilation alone, but a fear that this wonderful thing that happened to him, that he should be favored with himself, might be annihilated. He is afraid of the afterdeath, yet he gets down on his knees and begs his Maker to save him, his Maker who is the afterdeath. I've watched his face grow old, take on

things that would make wise men of other people, yet his spirit remains unchanged. And he is unique. Fear does not make him immune to fear."

Cailini looked at him. "Do you want me to go on?"

Lunagan, who had heard no more than the first two sentences because he had been busy framing what he would say when Cailini finished, was startled.

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"I've seen—"

Abruptly Cailini stopped. He felt that if he looked at the man's face once more he would puke.

"What's the matter?" Lunagan asked.

Sulkily, "Nothing."

"But why did you—?"

He snarled, "Shut up."

"But—"

Now he all but screamed, "Christ, are you deaf? Shut up, I said."

Cailini clenched his hands, squeezed them until the knuckles glowed white under the mud and atabrine.

Almost inaudibly Lunagan muttered, "I'm sorry."

Cailini broke then. He jumped forward, caught the little man's lapels, began violently to shake him, shouting and sobbing.

"Shut up! Goddammit, shut up! I'll kill you if you say another word!"

Lunagan tore himself loose, fell into a corner. He raised his hands to protect his face. As Cailini lifted his boot to kick, he saw Lunagan's eyes dilate with terror.

The boot remained suspended in the air. Then, as suddenly as the anger had hit him, it evaporated. Cailini grabbed his pack and rifle, raised himself out of the hole and began to crawl rapidly back to his former position.

And when he got there, he muttered to himself, "Christ, Cailini! Now what in hell was that for?"

He told himself he was the most miserable creature on earth. He kicked the water in the hole. He kicked his pack. He threw his rifle down, shouted and swore, took off his helmet and began to bail out the hole. He scooped so energetically, his helmet picked up lumps of brown mud and flung them up and out. They splashed on the green vegetation around the foxhole and began to destroy the camouflage.

He said he didn't give a damn about Lunagan. If he'd hurt him, good. He should have kicked the bastard's head in. Son of a bitch was a danger to them all. They'd put up with his crap long enough. Time somebody bore down on the praying

hypocrite. No good to man or woman. Pity the woman that got him. No, serve her right. If she was dumb enough to take him, she should be made to put up with him. That would knock the dumbness out of her.

His helmet dipped and scooped, picked up the mud and threw it as high and far as his flaying arms could project it.

It was then that he felt a hand hit him between his shoulder blades, a sharp and stinging blow.

He wheeled around, saw a mud-coated face staring belligerently.

"Have you gone crazy?" Robins shouted.

When Cailini had felt the blow, a wild hope surged through him. A name sang in his heart. Hervey. Then, turning, seeing only a plump, red face, he cried aloud in despair.

"Crazy?" Cailini yelled back. "Sure I'm crazy. I'm as crazy as every other son of a bitch who's spent over two years on these bastard islands." His lips curled back in an ugly line. "But you wouldn't know about that, would you, Robins? You've been here only six months. You're a goddam rookie. You wouldn't know."

Robins' mouth fell open. Cailini could not have hurt him more.

"Where were you?" Cailini raved. "Working in some defense plant? Dodging the draft?"

Robins lay flat on the earth, felt the coldness of the mud as it pressed against his knees, his thighs, his stomach, his chest. It was, after the recent rain, a clammy cold that dispersed the heat from his body's sweat, but it was not nearly so uncomfortable as the cold that moved inside him.

Cailini's voice continued, shrill, clamoring. "Sure I'm crazy. I'm as crazy as fifty million loons. Is that why you hit me?—like they hit people in the face?"

Robins replied, his voice a flat monotone. Had it been someone other than Cailini, he knew he would have crawled mutely away, or fought the man.

"I called your name for nearly a minute before I hit you."

"That was real thoughtful of you. Real generous. Unfortunately, I don't have any money with me. If I had, I'd give you a silver dollar."

Robins disregarded this. Wearily he asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm cleaning out my foxhole. Do you mind? Or would you sooner have me turn it inside out and shake it?" Listening to himself, he began to laugh.

"Don't you know," the monotone continued, "that you're giving our position away?" He pointed to the vegetation that

was heavily streaked with mud. "The Japs have field glasses, you know."

"You don't say! Why, you brilliant boy!"

"By your mud they'll measure the distance. Then they'll start a mortar barrage."

"My! How much you've learned. You know, you're underrated. You should be the Profile's aide. You could run the war while he posed for the newsreel men. You could hand him his hat, make sure he wasn't caught with that bald head like he once was."

Robins looked sadly at the mud. If the Japs did notice it, and usually they were eagle-eyed, the squad, and maybe the company, could start counting the minutes they had left. The enemy was either accurate or thorough in the placing of mortar shells. If he did not get the first ones in, he would keep bombing until he did.

Robins wished it would rain, a heavy torrential rain that would wash the mud off the leaves onto the ground. Other than this, he did not see what could be done about the destroyed camouflage.

Anyway, he said to himself, he'd better see the lieutenant and tell him. Perhaps the squad could be moved someplace else. Moved for a little while at least. Until the threat, or the barrage itself was over.

Of course, Cailini would get hell.

Robins shrugged.

Even if it meant a court-martial, he had to tell the lieutenant.

His decision made, he turned from Cailini and crawled hurriedly away.

Voss de Lainy saw him coming, made a tired gesture. He did not like the look of that laboring crawl.

"What's wrong, Robins?"

Robins opened his mouth, but as he began to speak he saw beyond the officer. He started. De Lainy saw the sudden start and wheeled around, expecting to see advancing enemy troops. But there was nothing. All that advanced was a blinding sheet of rain.

"What *is* it, Robins?"

The corporal hesitated. "I was wondering how soon you'd send a man for Polson, sir." He added a lame, "I was worried."

Voss de Lainy stared at Robins, and asked suspiciously, "That all you wanted?"

"Yes, sir."

He made a noise in his throat.

"What, sir?"

"Nothing. But on your way back, see Sergeant Tor of the second and tell him I said he was to loan you a man."

"Yes, sir."

The officer gazed long and thoughtfully at the retreating figure, and he made a mental note to check on the first squad as soon as he could spare the time.

7

ROSINSKI opened his mouth and gagged. He wished he could be sick. There was that feeling in his stomach that comes from an elevator ride. Falling down, a sudden stop, falling again and his stomach left up there, pausing at the point of departure.

He was glad that Robins was away. He hoped he would stay away. One more word about that bitch Martha right now and he would go crazy.

Staring hard at nothing, he told himself to take it easy, not to act like a spoiled child. He said, "That kind of thinking doesn't get you anywhere." Then he thought about what he had said. Vaguely it came to him that he had said the same thing a thousand times before, but this was the first occasion he had actually thought about the words. And he wondered what kind of thinking it took to get you someplace.

His thoughts ran on, light half-thoughts, his emotion too heavy for coherent thinking. They were luxury thoughts, the part of his mind that loved him trying to soothe him because the rest of his being lashed him. It was a battle. He had no idea it was going on, or that he would be defeated.

He began to think about his dead wife.

Too bad they'd never taken that trip. A second honeymoon it was to have been. Maria and he sure talked about it enough. Funny, he hadn't thought about that in years.

Maria.

I loved you so much. I swear when we kissed you burned my lips. And your hands, always so good and cool. Jesus-hands I called them. Because they could always rub the tiredness away, no matter how tired I was. And when I kissed your neck, when I licked your neck, how the goose pimples used to come out all over you. I liked that. Because you said I was the only one could do it. Wait a minute. How did you know I was the only one? You said there'd never been anyone else. Re-

member how you used to kid about the iceman and the milkman?

The milkman.

Great big guy. Looked a bit like Polson.

That damn Polson over there. Just staring and staring. Getting on everybody's nerves. Christ, why can't he snap out of it?

The elevator swiftly falling, down and down, and now a shuddering instant stop. His stomach turning over, a bowling ball. Not quite sick. Almost though.

I wonder if you would have written much? Never did get a letter from you. No need. We saw each other every day. I wonder what kind of a letter you would have written? Damn lot of good it would have done. No mail for a month now. Not that it matters. Dad's the only one left to write. Sis does, but, hell, who cares if she does or not? And Dad too, for that matter. He can't say anything that means anything. Now if I buddied with somebody like Hervey or Cailini—

Hervey or Cailini.

They didn't need letters. They get into that tight little clan and don't need things like letters. They've got, at least, they had, someone to talk to.

Talk.

Robins and his bitch Martha. Talk, talk, talk. Morning, noon and night. Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Never happy unless he's yapping about the whore. Thinks I'm here for one purpose. To listen to him.

I.

Isn't it enough I sit in this shithole week after week?—wanting to go home and knowing there's not a damn thing to go home to? You'd think he'd understand and shut up.

The elevator falling faster, stopping more often, the sickness gushing up from his stomach, lodging in his throat, then dropping back.

Rosinski squeezed his eyelids shut, pressed his fingers over them, worked his hands over his face and temples, the heels of his hands over his jaw. It did not help. He took his hands away, began to move around the tiny space. He kicked the wall and he kicked Robins' jungle pack, wishing it were the man himself. He clenched and unclenched his hands. Then, suddenly, before he realized what he had done, he had punched the wall with all the strength of his arm. Stinging, excruciating pains shot through his knuckles, but they were exquisite pains, like the pains around his sexual organs at the instant of orgasm.

He gazed at his knuckles. The skin was lacerated and bleeding. He looked at the wall, wondering why he had not hurt himself more. Then he saw that the monsoon had softened

the earth. It was too bad, he thought, that the monsoon hadn't softened the little stones that were embedded there. His knuckle would be sore for days, and it would take weeks for the laceration to heal.

Now, after the first pain, a dull throbbing set in.

Deep inside him, he knew that Robins was a good man. He was honest and tried pitifully hard to make himself an efficient squad leader. If he was boring, not satisfying as a friend, it was not the fault of Robins. There were millions of people just like him. It was only the rare individual who had that curiously soothing quality that Hervey had. Robins was absorbed by his life. Whatever he did and whatever he thought was Martha-dominated. He could not help that. Their association had been the one enchantment in his otherwise humdrum life.

Rosinski knew that Robins was not really talking to him. The grinding monologue was a soliloquy, not a narrative. And without these monologues, Rosinski knew, the man would be as lonely and unhappy as himself.

He, Rosinski, should realize that more than anyone else.

Well, he did. But sometimes, like today, when he felt like some trapped animal, when he wanted to fight, and all his thinking said there was nothing to fight about, Robins' talk was more than he could bear.

The elevator began to pick up speed now, rushing through dark and cold space.

If only he could hang on. He'd feel better soon. He'd pull himself out of this. He'd done it before. So hang on. Soon they'd go to a rest area. Maybe in a few days. Maybe Hervey would come back. And in bivouac he'd get Cailini to talk some more about that skyline. So hang on. Only a few more days in this shithole and rotting like a corpse.

If only his stomach would stop yawning!

Well, he'd smashed his fist against the wall, and that hadn't helped. But he knew what would help. A fight with Robins. A fight with him would put everything all right.

Stop it. You're a grown man. Christ's sake, act like a man. The squad says you're a quiet guy. Then stay quiet. They say you're easy to get along with and that you keep yourself to yourself. Okay, okay. Stay in character.

He would. He'd try hard. If only Robins would help. For just a few hours. No Martha. No word on the troubles of being squad leader. No sympathy asked.

Just a few hours.

Then he'd be fine. The Rosinski of old. Inoffensive. Nonchalant. Regular. Not giving a good goddam.

Just a few hours.

It was the least the man could do after all the listening and encouraging and listening and advising and listening he'd done.

And all he asked for was just a few hours.

Then Rosinski screamed. Not with his voice, but with his soul. And all the ravaging misery of two years of black loneliness went into that scream.

Robins was not sure whether the rain was an act of God or a lucky coincidence, but he decided to take no chances. His lips quietly moving, he whispered a prayer of thanksgiving.

He did not know that it was one of those breaks that occur in war and alter the destiny of many lives. Without the rain, the Japs might already be systematically bombing the area around the destroyed camouflage. Many men now alive might be dead.

Robins made a mental note to tell Martha about the incident in his next letter.

He paused.

No. It probably wouldn't get by the censor. Questions might be raised. And if it did get by, it would worry her. So he would save it, store it away in his mind along with the hundreds of other incidents he was saving, and tell her when he got home, when he was safe and there was no danger that next time he might not be so lucky.

Crawling closer to his hole, he passed Cailini. He saw the man stare hotly, and immediately Robins was struck anew.

He did not understand it at all. Cailini had always been such a decent guy. In the past he had gone out of his way to be decent. Often he had asked about Martha, had wanted to know how she was making out these days. He had asked if it were a boy or a girl that he wanted. During bivouac, when the squad had gone too far in their kidding, it was always Cailini who had rescued him, saying, "Aw, lay off, fellows. Give the guy a break. You're all just so goddamn jealous you aren't men enough to do that to a woman yourselves."

But now, all that was changed. The warmth Robins had felt for Cailini was gone. He knew he would never be able to forget what Cailini had said or how Cailini had looked. The injustice and the unfairness of the words, the sneer on his face, the contempt in his voice, had made an indelible impression.

Cailini had nearly killed them all. Only the break of the rain had saved them. Robins was sure of that. And where would Martha and the kid be if he had gotten killed?

The more he thought about it, the more indignant he became.

He could have understood if that crazy Polson had done it, but never Cailini. Hell, if Cailini wanted to die that bad, why didn't he start running toward the Jap lines? It was unforgivable that he should try and take the whole squad with him.

Robins felt a shudder of horror pass through him. His hands trembled. He could barely steady himself as he let himself down into the muddy recess.

Poor darling Martha. Well, Cailini wasn't going to get away with it. He, Robins, was going to see that the whole squad was told about how Cailini had nearly killed them all. Somebody had to stop Cailini, and the squad were just the ones to do it. And they would stop Cailini when he told them. By Jesus, yes. And he'd start right now by telling Rosinski.

Poor darling Martha.

Rosinski tried hard not to listen to the voice. Putting out his hands, he dug his nails into the oozy parapet of earth, squeezed the soil until his knuckles were bleached white with the effort.

The bitterness inside him was so big it seemed tangible.

Suddenly he wished he had four hands. That with the other two he could close his eardrums. No, six. That with the other two he could choke Robins.

The voice became a lament, something that knew it cried in a place barren of sympathy. It got shriller and louder, and by its effort of indignation strove to exact from its listener some nod of verification, some word of I-know-how-it-is.

But nothing came.

Robins shouted at a head that was turned the other way, looking at everything but the person speaking to it. So the body of the voice reached out, roughly caught at a shoulder, and by violence forced the face to look at the spot where the voice came from.

Rosinski choked when the hands touched him. He wanted to be sick when Robins' hot breath and spit sprayed him.

Then, abruptly, he was not controlling himself any longer. His fist shot out. He hit Robins with all the force in him, and as the man reeled under the blow, his fingers reached forward, itching to feel the plump, red throat.

Robins pounded Rosinski's face, but it did not lessen the grip around his throat. He could not breathe or speak. The face he was punching blurred. He ceased to lash out altogether as the blackness and the stabbing, multi-colored spots rushed

closer. Before the roaring sound he could only feebly wave his arms.

Rosinski felt exulted as his knuckles tensed harder. All over him was the same heady sexual pain he had felt when he had punched the wall. It was in his fingers where he squeezed, in his biceps where the power stemmed, in his knee that pinned Robins down. And the harder he squeezed, the more exultant he became.

Then he was not squeezing any more. All his power exploded as something hit him on the back of his neck. Sickness gushed down his spine and spun in his head. He wanted to cough and then vomit, but nothing happened. He was paralyzed. A slow hand had caught at him, had pushed him forward. He pitched head first into the mud-water, unconscious before he hit.

"Are you all right?" Voss de Lainy asked.

Robins knew he could not speak, but he managed to nod his head. De Lainy turned to Rosinski.

Testing his damaged throat by swallowing, Robins winced as the sudden pain burned. He swore silently.

What a crazy morning! Twice nearly murdered in as many minutes! Well, in half an hour.

He looked at Rosinski. The man was inhumanly strong. He had been unmoved by the punches rained on his face. And Robins, remembering his own feats of strength, knew he was no weakling. Evidence of that strength plainly showed on Rosinski's face—puffed and reddened eyes, a bleeding nose, a cut jaw, a broken tooth.

Slowly Robins raised his head and looked at the clouds. It was the second time that morning he gave thanks for a providential intervention. He saw Martha's image before him, and now, thoroughly frightened, he wondered what would have happened to her if the lieutenant had not come along and hit Rosinski on the back of the neck with a hard, clipping rabbit punch.

Rosinski opened his eyes. He saw Robins staring at him. He saw the anxious face of de Lainy. As he came to, he saw that he was in a sitting position, supported by the kneeling officer. Water was being splashed on his face.

Then he remembered.

A flush of shame spread over his face. He turned away from the kindly inquiring face of the lieutenant.

"How are you feeling?"

He muttered, "Okay."

Looking at him, seeing that red burn, de Lainy quietly said, "Don't be like that."

Rosinski kept his face averted.

"We've all felt like this," de Lainy went on. "You've seen it happen yourself. You shouldn't feel badly." His voice sharpened. "How much do you think a man can take before he breaks? You think he can go on forever?" Now his voice softened. "But this wasn't smart. Next time, wait and get mad at the Jap." He almost smiled.

As Rosinski remained silent, the officer shook him.

"Don't you understand?"

Rosinski said, "I understand." But he did not look at the lieutenant.

Robins, listening, was amazed. The talk was not at all as he had expected.

You'd think it was Rosinski who'd nearly been murdered, wouldn't you? You really would. You'd think that it was he, Robins, who had tried to get blood on his hands. But then, he was just the squad leader. An NCO and a sucker who took crap from every son of a bitch in this bastard Army, officers and privates alike.

Well, he'd taken all he was going to take. In the past he'd tried so damned hard to be decent, and look where it had gotten him! Hell, that was all over. Done with. Finished. He hadn't wanted the job anyway. They'd shoved it on him. Now he knew why. No one else was sucker enough to have it. The other bastards were wise, knew the score. He was new and didn't. So they'd palmed it off on him. Christ, how they must have laughed. Well, they'd laugh on the other side of their faces now. All that damn fine talk the lieutenant had handed him. And he, stupid bastard that he was, had fallen hook, line and sinker for it.

Well, he'd tried to hand the job in and they wouldn't take it. Now they could look out. From here on in he was through playing decent. He'd be as big a bastard as they were.

De Lainy turned to Robins. He saw that as he explained Rosinski's action, the squad leader's eyes were closed. Nothing more than an odd broken phrase penetrated and registered, and immediately it hit, it was suffocated by his stirring sense of aloneness, his need to pity himself. So de Lainy talked on. He pleaded and reasoned. He tried logic and emotion, but the more he talked, the tighter Robins' sullen mouth line stretched. He backed farther into the corner, hoping by the gesture to symbolize his wish to remove himself from them.

De Lainy knew the corporal was right and should be allowed his obnoxious catering. It was the best way to drain frustration. But he did not dare allow it. The whole company was in one of its highly explosive moods. In this interim of waiting

for the bottlenecked division, they had been given time to think, to add two and two, to remember back-home lobbying and grafting and scrap iron sold to Japan; time to think of reasons to die for a nation that had called you (and would call you again when you got back) Jew and Hunky and Limey and Mick and Queer and Polack and Nigger and Po' White Trash. So much time that the ghost of God who lived in the womb of survival's genius began to fret and ask questions that could have shot from only one place, the historical Gethsemane. De Lainy was terrified, because it was now that these men took on one touch of Hervey, one foot unawaredly inside the fourth dimension, attuned to—knowing without realizing—the mysticism they had unwittingly kindled from despair, and though they did not hear the words of the angels' hymn, they tasted with all their passion its ominous warning mood. "Man, man, man . . . it's all right to die . . . all right if the cause is worth it . . . but beware if it isn't . . . for then, God have mercy upon you."

But that was not all. The angelic song had been picked up by some fiendish fifth column, and now, with new verses added, slanted with Machiavellian subtlety, became an alchemy that turned blood into pus.

"There's enough of God's soil to grow food on, isn't there? Enough seeds? Enough for all and to spare? And there's enough living and breathing space, isn't there? Enough raw materials in the earth for all men's needs? Then what in hell are we fighting for? I'll tell you, Joe. Words. That's what we're fighting for. Nothing more. Democracy. Freedom. The Rights of Man. Words—just so many words." The smart agent had stopped any answering expostulations by pointing to the Japs. "Do you think they want to fight? Don't be stupid, Joe. Wouldn't you sooner be in Tokyo with some cute little Yoshiwara gal?" Then, before the shattered illusions and the sudden cold and frightened hearts, the final note had been whispered. "The big boys, Joe. The big shots and their power. International industry. Cartels. Munitions and combines. Economies. Powers behind the powers. Never little guys, Joe. Never you or I."

De Lainy knew they were lost men. They could not bear to ask the terrifying question, for now they knew, in all the world there is no tragedian as poignant, pathetic and despised as the little man, who, hoping he is the shadow of a hero, discovers his true identity, a sucker. Now, because they did not dare ask what they could not answer, the mystique of despair, that twentieth-century Colossus, whipped them, and they, running, came to the end of the road, the garden of the historical

Gethsemane. It made no difference whether they were good or evil men. Only the lukewarm escaped. Good or evil, their incandescent emotions would not let them surrender to the swiftly spreading empire of Suckerdom.

So they lived in the vale of frustration, where there is no time or space, no day or night, only a checkerboard dimension. They knelt at the weeping-stone, as though their massed tears would extinguish Michael's flaming sword.

It was, indeed, a monstrous experience. Life lived in Gethsemane is life lived at the core of art, and inexorably it was driving them insane. Because of circumstance, the only creation permitted was Calvary, and confusing this was the angelic song "Beware . . . make sure the cause is worth the death!" However, there was, with all his terrible facets, creation's brother, and toward him they strained. Kill, fight, maim. The Jap. And if no Jap, anybody.

Now, de Lainy knew, they were only able to hold on to the thin thread of sanity because they did kill and maim. Kill anybody. Even Robins—Robins who was preparing to kindle lovely refreshing murder.

De Lainy looked hard at Robins as he talked, and he despaired before the corporal's sullen mouth. Finally, after an hour, after receiving nothing more than an odd surly nod and a bitter, "Yes, sir," de Lainy gave up. Slowly he climbed out of the hole and began to crawl back to his own position.

In this moment he would have given everything he possessed to have Hervey back with his squad.

8

IT seemed that the day would never end, and for some indefinable reason, the squad wanted the night worse than they had ever wanted it before. Now, while it was still several hours distant, it was already nostalgic, its black envelopment warm and friendly. And the harder they projected themselves, pulling the night in, the slower it moved.

Polson stared vacantly toward the enemy. Cailini, with his poncho wrapped around him, was leaning against the rear wall, tormenting himself by remembering all the things that hurt. Lunagan bit his lips, telling himself that he would never get entree into the clan now. Rosinski tried three times to overcome Robins' sullenness and failed abjectly.

Then he too began to stare in the direction of the enemy. Robins lived and relived the day's incidents, reprimanding himself because he had not replied thus or lashed back so, and each time he became more angry, more alone. Adams slept. And Tuthill, the one happy member of the squad, sang a song.

Oh, I took her down to fields of grass,
Played the bagpipes on her ass,
Singing do dar, do dar, do dar day.
Oh, I took her down to fields of corn,
Showed her how she was bred and born,
Singing do dar, do dar, do dar day.

The rain had not ceased since what Robins called the Cailini Miracle. Quite seriously he told himself he should not have prayed so hard. At frequent intervals the foxholes were bailed out. If possible, the mud became juicier, acquired a stickier adhesive quality. It seemed more of an effort to raise their feet, and each time they replaced them they failed to find a position of comfort. Their bodies ached with fatigue and yet protested the lack of exercise.

They told themselves they were waiting for night, and they became exasperated because it did not immediately descend. And when night came, they knew they would be impatient for the dawn. They were so tired that the fear of infiltration troops was momentarily removed.

The heady tension, that lure and need of violence, had been drained from Rosinski and Cailini. They were left with a curious sense of letdown, knowing they had made fools of themselves. Both were ashamed. However, Rosinski's shame was diluted by Robins' aloofness. Occasionally his old loneliness bubbled up within him, but now that his violence was gone and he was clean inside, it found nothing to fasten onto, slipping back because he was the Rosinski of old, a little contemptuous, indifferent, shrugging. So when Robins stared hostilely, he told himself the corporal would come around. Give the man a little time. And even deeper within him he knew that he did not really care whether he came around or not.

Cailini felt that he would do something if the ache in his joints did not stop. He did not know what he would do, but something. Weep. Scream. Go running for the Japs. Anything so long as it was something and not just sitting and waiting. The pains sprang dully from his knees and shoulder blades. Their sting seemed to waver with his thoughts, now

unbearable, now just quietly tormenting. He stretched and tense his long thin legs. He worked his shoulders. Bending over, his hands thrust into the water, he tried to touch his toes. The mud oozed around his fingers, lodged under his nails. The third time he repeated the exercise his head reeled and his vision blurred. For a moment he thought he was going to faint, then slowly the noises in his head quieted and as his vision cleared he again saw the land in its true perspective.

At last the night came. It was almost dark. The rain had ceased and a mild wind blew.

Robins carefully climbed out of his hole, crawled to the first foxhole and began his evening duty of making the rounds.

Gare, the substitute replacement from the second squad, now Polson's keeper, shook his head before Robins' inquiring stare. Looking at the farmer, then at the corporal, he said, "Same. He's bin like that all day. Same. No change. Strikes me he ain't gonna change. Crazy, if you ask me."

Robins, looking at the vacant stare, felt an almost overwhelming desire to slap Polson. Damn the man! He should have snapped out of this a week ago. It was childish to be upset, and for so long. And the whole squad was upset by it. The staring fool jarred on their sore nerves something awful. He was such an oxlike man. You'd think he, of all people could take things. Lord, he was built to resist anything. Why in hell couldn't he snap out of it? It was driving them all nuts.

Robins tightly clenched his itching palm, breathed hard and moved on to the next man.

Cailini returned Robins' venomous look. To his curt inquiry, "You want anything?" Cailini had drawled, "Yeah."

"What?"

Cailini snapped back, "To be alone."

Robins turned and moved on. As he crawled toward the Tuthill foxhole he wondered why he had not replied to Cailini with equal offensiveness. He successfully camouflaged the true reply from himself. His throat still ached, and Cailini's eyes had held that same smoldering quality that Rosinski's had.

So Robins shouted with the full power of his lungs at Tuthill, "Look at that gun. Just look at it. Christ, I never saw anything so filthy before."

Adams groaned aloud before the suddenly soured Tuthill. And the man had been so cheerful and decent all day!

Tuthill growled, "What's wrong?"

Robins echoed his words, flung them high as he played

amazed before such dumbness. "What's wrong? What's wrong?" He descended from the high peak of incredulity, laughed, sank to biting sarcasm. "Oh, nothing's wrong. Nothing at all. Just that the damn thing's plastered with rust. Liable to fall apart any minute now." He laughed again. "No good telling you to clean it now. No good at all. I guess the damn rust is what holds the thing together."

Confronting Tuthill's burning eyes and set jaw, Robins yelled, "You clean that Jesus gun first thing in the morning. See? And I don't mean maybe."

Before Tuthill could reply, Robins had gone, crawling in the direction of Lunagan's hole.

The corporal was surprised to find himself smiling, to hear his voice, now booming with cheerful amiability, "Hello, Lunagan. How are you tonight?"

Tuthill stuttered with rage.

"That—why, that goddam rookie. The nerve of the bastard. Talking to me like that." He implored of Adams, "To me. Me of all people."

Adams, angry at Robins himself, quietly replied, "He sure shot his mouth off."

"I'll say he shot his mouth off. Son-of-a-bitching rookie. Can't take the squad leadership, that's what. Gone to his head. Thinks he's the Profile himself. Well, he's got another think a-coming. Goddam if I'm going to take his shit."

Adams knew that Robins was terribly worried. And Adams had excused him even before his anger completed its ascent. But he kept his mouth closed, letting Tuthill rave, because he knew the last thing the gunner wanted was an explanation. Tuthill's egotism, always a vulnerable thing, was never more exposed. If he was crossed now, he would lash back with fury. And Adams was already afraid. He had felt the swift ferment in his stomach, he had seen the slight tremble in his arm. Each flash of Tuthill's eyes, each savage movement of his body, had impressed itself upon him. The magnetism of the man had never been more intoxicating. And then Adams knew why he had forgiven Robins. His forgiveness was not at all what he had imagined it to be.

Rapidly and slyly he looked at the man, each look a little longer than the previous one. The narrow hips, the full and packed buttocks, the rounded kneecaps, and the brutality of the boot-clad feet.

He told himself to stop it. Tuthill might see. Tuthill might guess. And Tuthill was extravagantly ruthless. It was what made him Tuthill.

But Tuthill did not see. He was too preoccupied. And Adams was glad, though deep and strong within him he felt a bitter sense of loss.

Slowly he turned and looked at the clouds. It was almost dark.

At last night came, the hours beginning their dull and slow revolution. Tired as they were, few slept. In each mind simmered an angry insistence.

Bivouac.

Weren't they ever going to be sent to a rest area? Now what in hell did HQ think they were? Supermen? Robots? Something that could take the weariness and misery forever? Or were they a forgotten bunch?—the fact that they were where they were, had been for countless days, now just something on paper and lost in the infinite stacks of HQ's files?

Had the practice of sending men to a rest area become obsolete? Had it? Or were they guinea pigs in some diabolical experiment of endurance? Were they?

Oh, dear Jesus, send that order through. Send it through soon. Tomorrow. Now.

Please, Jesus.

Goddammit, send it through.

Tuthill had heaped all the profanities he knew upon Robins' head. He had analyzed countless plans whereby he would get-his-own-back-on-that-son-of-a-bitch. He had compiled many wisecracks that he would meaningfully utter at the first opportunity. And now, because he had, in fantasy retrospect, met and with effortless ease conquered his enemy, got the man screaming for mercy, he felt better. Something warm and marvelously Tuthillish touched him. Luxuriously he stretched himself, deliciously felt each splendid muscle.

He saw Adams staring toward the enemy, looking at the rocket flares that flamed in the sky.

He told himself, they did look good.

Their living, breathing color scattered the indigo shroud of the night, brought a magical loveliness. Garnet and nuances of garnet streaked along the sky. As the flares slowly fell to earth, the cloud panorama swiftly changed, new lines and shadows spinning more miracles of color.

"Pretty good, huh?" said Tuthill.

Adams nodded.

Tuthill pointed. "Like a Fourth of July."

"No. It's bigger than that. Like a gateway to hell."

"Hey!" Tuthill exclaimed. "You're pretty good. You should tell Cailini that."

Adams flushed with pleasure. Tuthill moved close and rested his arms on the parapet of earth beside Adams. The tip of his elbow touched his partner's forearm.

"Are you feeling better?" Adams asked.

"Better?"

"You know. Robins."

"Oh, that!" Tuthill waved a hand. "He's not worth bothering with. But I'll get even with the son of a bitch. You just wait and see."

Suddenly, inexplicably, Adams felt friendly toward Tuthill. "Sure, sure. You can too. You'd have no trouble."

He was astonished at what he had said. It was like another person talking. Some part of his mind, an inner and detached part, seemed to be watching him, the new him, the now pro-Tuthill him. And it was that inner part that had been astonished at the deliberate kowtowing. He felt as though he were two people, and the old Adams was shriveled.

"Yeah," said Tuthill, "I won't have any trouble." He paused, then confided. "I'll get a kick out of getting even."

Adams knew exactly what he meant, but still he asked, "How do you mean?"

"I'm like that. It's the way I'm made. I like to crush people. It makes me feel good."

Adams began to tremble. He asked, "Women?"

"Anybody. Just so long as I can make them do what I want them to do."

Then Tuthill looked at him. His eyes were bright and hard. "You're frightened, aren't you?"

Adams breathed hard. "Frightened?"

"That's what I said."

It was an effort to ask, "What should I be frightened of?"

Tuthill laughed, and the malice in his eyes deepened. "Me."

"I'm not frightened of anybody."

Tuthill moved closer. Softly he said, "You're lying."

Adams turned his head, unable to meet the bright devouring stare. Almost inaudibly he said, "No." But he knew that he had not turned away soon enough. That avaricious stare of Tuthill's! He knew what it meant. And he knew that Tuthill knew he knew.

Panic-stricken, he looked into No Man's Land.

"Look! That bamboo clump! Middle front! Don't you think there are Japs—?"

Tuthill waved a languid hand. "Sure there are Japs there.

Been there a couple of days. We'll blast 'em when we get ready."

Tuthill put out his hand and began to move it up and down Adams' back. "What the matter, kid? You're shaking all over."

Again Adams heard Tuthill's laugh.

"Do I—bother you?"

There was nothing in the landscape. Apart from the shell-ravaged earth, the land seemed bereft of anything that remotely resembled Japs or war. Adams stared harder. And the more he stared, the more the jungle seemed to recede. There was nothing out there, nothing but Tuthill's other hand, so close to him, resting on the parapet of earth. Then there was Tuthill's strong wrist, covered with short hair. Tuthill's bare arm, tanned and rounded and firm, insatiably voluptuous.

He almost choked on the next words. "Listen, Tuthill."

"I'm listening."

"You've got to stop that."

Tuthill raised his brows, pretended astonishment. "Stop what, kid?"

Adams hesitated, remembering the other incident, stammered, "You know what I mean."

And again that laugh. It sounded terrible now.

"You tell me, kid."

"It's like this. Well, I don't know how to say it. But well, I'm not like that."

Tuthill said softly, "You're lying."

"No, I'm not. Maybe I was. Maybe I was like that. But not any more."

"People like you don't ever change."

Adams backed into a corner, and Tuthill followed.

"So you've changed?"

"Yes, I have."

Then Tuthill's hands shot out. He hit Adams in the stomach, and while he was gasping for breath, Tuthill felt his genitals.

Tuthill laughed very quietly now, the menace in his voice big. "If you've changed," he said, asking the unanswerable question, "how come that's so hard?"

Mocking and laughing, he leaned against the wall. Adams watched him, now hypnotized. All the ferment in his stomach bubbled up, caught him and swung him high. He knew there was no escape, so he stared at Tuthill, wrapped himself in the heady smell, saw, in the flare-light, Tuthill's ruthless, fascinating hands slowly unfastening the fly buttons.

"Come here, Adams."

A wild sob tore from his throat as he stumbled toward him. And he was glad, even when he heard the final brutality, Tut-

hill, through clenched teeth and still laughing, "Chow down, you bastard. Chow down."

Tuthill slept soundly that night. It was a deep and dreamless sleep. His face was serene, a gentle smile on his full lips, like the face of a young and guileless boy.

He did not wake until an hour before dawn. He opened his eyes, languorously stretched himself. He felt good this morning, and vaguely he wondered why. Then he remembered. He smiled and called:

"Hey, Adams!"

There was no answer.

He called again, felt around the foxhole. He grew puzzled. He called louder.

A flare rocketed in the sky, burst and threw the indigo into garnet relief.

With an open mouth and fear smashing down on him, he saw that the hole was empty except for himself.

He fell to his knees, and frantically began to search the water.

There was no one there. And there was nothing in the hole, nothing but the gun, several boxes of ammunition, Adams' rifle, two jungle packs and himself.

Adams had gone.

"Gone?" shouted Robins.

"Yes." Tuthill was careful not to meet the corporal's eyes.

"But where could he have gone?"

"I don't know."

"You must be crazy."

Tuthill pointed to the foxhole which he was standing in. "You can see for yourself. He isn't here."

"No—" Robins admitted, looking again and again to make sure "—he's not there."

"Well—he must have gone."

"But there's no place to go."

Hopefully, Tuthill suggested, "Maybe an infiltrating Jap got him."

"Talk sense, man. Christ!—how could be be carried away?"

"Hit over the head and dragged."

Robins again reluctantly admitted, "I suppose so." Then, as an inspiration hit him, "Well, if he was dragged, there must be some tracks. With all this rain and the mud, some tracks would be made."

After they had searched and re-searched all around the hole,

Robins called to Tuthill who was a few yards in No Man's Land. "I don't see anything, do you?"

Tuthill shouted back, "No. I don't."

"The only tracks I see are ours. They all lead to the flanks."

"Looks like we're back at the beginning."

"You're telling me." Robins shook his head. "Now where in hell—?"

And then Tuthill saw the tracks. There were three footprints. He felt his body turn cold. They were heel and toe footprints. Someone had walked. With frantic haste, Tuthill crawled farther forward, slyly laid his body over the tracks and carefully obliterated them.

"Found something?" Robins shouted.

"No."

"Then what are you doing way out there?"

"Thought I saw a nickel. But it was only a piece of tin."

Robins, now alarmed, yelled, "For Christ's sake, stop looking for nickels at a time like this! Come on," he snarled before the gunner's hesitancy. "Get back into this goddam foxhole before I knock you in." And under his breath, "Nickels! Looking for Jesus nickels when his buddy's disappeared. Christ! Christ!"

Tuthill muttered, "Sorry, Corp."

But Robins did not hear. He had gone. Tuthill saw him crawling toward the lieutenant's hole as fast as his plump but agile body could carry him.

Tuthill shivered. His body poured sweat.

He sighed with relief when he remembered how he had obliterated the footprints. Plainly they had pointed to the Jap line. Adams had not been dragged by an infiltrationist. Adams had walked.

Walked! Walked! Walked!

Why?

Then he remembered the night Hervey had removed Lunagan and had given him Adams.

"Watch your step, Tuthill," Hervey had grimly warned. "I won't stand for any damn foolishness."

Now he knew what he was afraid of. Not the lieutenant. He was sure he could lie his way through that. But Hervey! —and Hervey might return.

Tuthill looked down at his arms and saw that they were covered with goose pimples.

Several squad members had heard Robins' bellowing, and now they shouted over to Tuthill, demanding to know:

"What's up? Something wrong?"

Tuthill wished he were a mole, wished that he could burrow

deep into the earth and escape their questioning. But he knew that he must answer, knew that he must not be hesitant, for if he were they would gossip, their eyes would look at each other with that what-gives-with-Tuthill look, and finally, they might grow suspicious enough to guess the truth. So he took a deep breath and pulled himself together, and though his heart beat rapidly, outwardly he acted a part with perfect aplomb.

"Adams has disappeared."

"Where in hell to?"

"How should I know?"

"When did he go?"

"In the night, I guess. He wasn't here when I woke up."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"Is he crazy?"

"Must be."

"Christ's sake! What next?"

"Lord knows!"

"Was he sick last night or something?"

"Hell, no. Well as you or I. He was rather quiet though."

"Did he say anything?"

"No. Not that I remember." Tuthill pretended to search his memory. "Wait a minute."

"What?"

"He did say he couldn't take the war much longer."

"Hell, men, we all say that."

"But maybe he meant it."

"You stupid bastard! Do you think we don't mean it?"

"Yes, that's right too."

"But where could he have gone?"

"God knows. There are only three places to go. To one of the sides and you guys would have seen him if he'd done that. Behind, and he would have gotten picked up by now if he'd done that. Or else—"

"Yeah. Forward. But how come nobody saw him?"

"Maybe he stood still when the flares exploded. Like the Japs do when they infiltrate. A man looks like a shot tree then."

"But why should he do that? You know, that's suicide."

"Jesus! That's right. I never thought about that."

"Do you think—?"

"I don't know. Beats me."

"But why?"

Again Tuthill breathed deep. It required all the courage he possessed to say, "Well, you know Adams! I never saw anybody try so hard to get theirs. Since we came over here he's

been trying. Maybe he got tired of hoping to get his and just went out after it."

"You mean?—about his?—Well, you never know!—being like he was!"

Tuthill could barely nod his head in agreement. "Maybe he couldn't take it any longer? Perhaps something snapped inside him?"

"Jesus! Poor devil!"

"Yeah. Poor devil."

Cailini, who had listened with growing impatience to the talk, now suddenly asked, "But what caused something to snap inside him? People don't just do things like that for no reason. Something has to be the cause. Now what? Do you know, Tuthill?"

Tuthill realized this was the crucial moment. Everything depended upon his answer. Cailini and the whole squad were peering over the edges of their foxholes, staring, waiting. In his anxiety, it seemed that they already knew his secret. He searched frantically for an answer, but the magnitude of his urgency blocked all thought. He opened and shut his mouth like a fish.

Then it happened, and Tuthill almost fainted with relief.

Robins came madly crawling toward the squad position. His return was even faster than his departure. He began to shout long before they could distinguish his message. All eyes were removed from Tuthill, were now turned to the approaching Robins.

"Fellows, fellows," he cried. "It's come! It's come at last!"

"What's come?" they chorused.

Now they could see his excited, joy-filled face.

"Bivouac," he shouted. "We're leaving within the hour."

A cheer sprang from every mouth. Buddies shook hands, slapped each other on the back, danced, hugged each other, feverishly reiterated, "Bivouac. Leaving within the hour. Did you hear that? Oh, ain't it marvelous? Ain't it something? Bivouac. Thank God. Hail Mary. Bivouac. So we ain't forgotten. Hurrah."

Tuthill knelt in his foxhole to hide his face. He was the only company member who did not share the abandon. But he was glad. Terribly glad.

They had forgotten all about Adams now.

9

THE truck shook and rattled its way south. They had been removed from the front line almost immediately after Robins had delivered the glad news. Usually companies were relieved at dawn, but because in this instance the Americans had some land protection, an immediate change-over was permitted.

Cailini looked around the truck. They were a sadly depleted squad. Only six of the twelve remained. Rosinski, Robins, Tuthill, Polson, Lunagan and himself. This was the worst loss they had ever suffered.

The joy brought by the news had evaporated. Like Cailini, the squad had looked around, had seen their losses, heard other squads mourn lost men, heard them berate the harshness of the last combat tour. Now they could see how many of the company were missing. Over one-third. It shocked them. Some were awed, a little ashamed that they themselves were still alive. So they laughed awkward laughs, apologized as they said, "Guess the devil looks after his own, huh?"

They rode southwards and little was said for the first hour. That hour was spontaneous. Faith was kept with the dead and mutilated. They grieved, but it was not like civilian grief. Cleanly and sharply it was adapting themselves to the now immortal, "Well, I guess his number was up." Some believed the dead were the only fortunate, for whatever death brought, it could not be worse than life as they had been living it. Even if it were nothing more than eternal blackness—well, that would be a serene thing. And they all remembered what Hervey had said. Death could not be lonely.

After the hour, when they realized and accepted the fact that "numbers would always be popping up, and have to be met," they began to be themselves again.

Bivouac was a welcome relief after the weeks of assault and defense. This they remembered, and consoled themselves. After the rigors of up front, it was something unique in the way of luxury. Men slept in pup tents. Men again slept lying down. They slept elevated above the mud, and threw off the shroud of death fatigue. They laughed and wisecracked, and became men again.

Bivouac was a place to congregate, to talk and kid and argue and bitch. Here they speculated, or rather, pipe-dreamed, on

the possibility of a Japanese capitulation. They traded news from home. And always sack-duty took up a giant measure of the day. Whenever they could swipe or barter or purchase from the medics a quantity of alcohol, a party was arranged. Sometimes, from the natives of the island, a particularly potent concoction of dubious origin, familarly named Jungle Juice or Depth Charge or Borgia's Knock-Out, was obtained. Parcels from home were received, always occasion for much comment.

Bivouac—all through the day and deep into the night, bull sessions were held. Men talked on every subject: religion and politics and sex, home and food and sex, the supernatural and science and sex, the commissioned officers and noncommissioned officers and sex, the mundane and bizarre and sex. They played cards and shot dice. It seemed inconceivable that men earning their meager amount of money could possibly win or lose such fabulous sums. But they did. At least, they said they did.

Bivouac—a rest area. And that was where they were going. Bearded and dirty and tired men looked at each other. They grinned, ruefully, wanly happy.

Bivouac, as Cailini had said, marked the end of a chapter in the book of war, the autobiography of war.

BOOK THREE

1

SHE walked as the casualties wanted her to walk, with languorous and swaying hips. She looked as they liked a woman to look: her hair golden and piled into a roll on her head, like captured sunlight; her eyes blue as the China Sea on a cloudless day. Yet these were as nothing compared to her smile. That hinted of an intimacy, of a secret shared between you and her alone. Her body was a dream made flesh. The casualties noted again and again that all the important places were softly curved—breasts, buttocks and thighs. Even the stomach held a slight protuberance, not enough to be gross, but sufficient to tantalize and to suggest a delightful wantonness.

Tonight she helped the nurse and, passing from bed to bed, handed out the assortment of pills and medicines.

"Corporal Rutkowski?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"What will you have?"

He grinned. "You."

She flared her hip and her eyes mocked him. "When you're man enough! When you're big enough!"

"I'm man enough. You just give me—"

She put an atabrine tablet in his mouth. "You talk too much." From the second bed she threw Rutkowski a final word, "Give me the strong, silent type—" and turning, "—like Magee here." She smiled, and in her eyes were all the seductive promise and intrigue she could gather. "Let's see. Your trouble is below the belt."

He was a double amputee, having lost both legs from a machine-gun burst.

"Below the belt. That will be a laxative."

He grinned back at her. "That's right. A laxative. Only I gotta have something sweet afterwards. My mom useda gimme a candy."

"We have no candy, Private Magee."

"You haven't?"

"No."

It was a game they played every night. All the patients watched, their faces stretched by wide grins.

"No candy, huh?"

"No candy."

He looked at her, a quizzical look. "My mom useda kiss me."

"Are you trying to wolf me, soldier?'

"Sergeant Calhoon!"

"That's right. Who ever heard of a sergeant kissing a private? Now—take your pills."

He would swallow them, look at her again. "My mom—"

"—useda kiss ya."

Then she would laugh, as she did tonight, bend over and kiss him.

"One of these nights," Norah warned, "I'm going to surprise you, soldier—and bring candy."

That delighted the patients. "The night Calhoon brings candy," they yelled, "the world will end."

She woke the third man and gave him a sleeping tablet.

Passing down the line, she straightened beds, fixed mosquito nets, emptied butt-cans and slop-cans. She wisecracked and flirted, and occasionally threw in a seasoning of homely philosophy. As her progress down the ward lengthened, she told herself not to think, then went right ahead and did just that.

The last man was sitting up in bed. He was hidden by the magazine he read. Puzzled, Norah looked at the patient in the neighboring bed.

Cavaretti said, "O'Neil died. This morning." Then, indicating the magazine with a nod of his head, added, "New patient."

She felt the sudden cold that rushed over her shoulders and up her neck.

Almost frantic, Norah asked, "How are you, Cavaretti?"

"I'm fine, Sarge."

O'Neil had been the kid of all kids.

"That's swell, Cavaretti."

O'Neil's crisp red hair had had that ridiculous cowlick. She had made a point of ruffling it every night.

Cavaretti said, "Guess I'll be leaving here soon."

"Fine. That's great."

O'Neil had said, "Say, Sarge—how come every girl wants to be my mother? Can't I ever have a girl? Just a girl?"

And she had answered, "I'll be your girl, O'Neil."

He had blushed furiously. Norah loved him for that.

Cavaretti paused, then continued rapidly, "—it was worth loosing a foot to get home."

Startled, Norah looked at him.

Now apprehensive, he asked, "Is that wrong?"

"What do you think?"

"Well—" then suddenly savage "—no. Goddam no." The words spat from his mouth. "I've been in and out of combat for over two years now. Let some other bastard do the fighting for a change." Defiantly he attacked her. "I'm glad, I'm glad! Hell, there are millions of guys who've never seen combat, never even been within the sound of it. And there's all those still back home. Sitting in the States and getting callouses on their fat fannies. That's their only combat. It isn't fair, I tell you. It isn't fair."

The magazine was lowered and a voice growled, "Take it easy, Joe." The voice softened to say, "Don't be stupid. Nothing is fair. Never was. You're going home. Let it go at that."

And Cavaretti, abashed, said, "I'm sorry. Guess I got hot."

Norah told him, "Don't be sorry. Be glad. And Cavaretti—"

"What?'

She touched his arm. "Take care of yourself. Good care."

Turning to the magazine man, her eyes expressed gratitude. She read the tag at the foot of the bed. "Hervey, William G., Sergeant." Checking her list, Norah asked, "What do they call you? Sarge? Bill? Will? Hervey?"

"Depends on who does the calling, Nurse. Among other things, it's usually Sarge or Bill."

"Okay, Bill. Drink this. And I'm not a nurse. Just a technician. At nights I help around here."

As he took his medicine, she looked at him. He had an ugly face, yet curiously compelling. His nose had once been broken and now twisted over to the left. His hair was stiff and wiry. Then she saw his eyes and his lips, and now Norah knew what made him compelling, what redeemed his face from brutality. His eyes and his mouth were noble, yet it was not in the classic sense of chiseled line and symmetry. No Pygmalion hand had labored over these, adoringly cutting. This nobility was strange, twisted, inverted, opposing all the rules of form, yet resulting in form. These were paradox. Friendly, yet Satanic. Friendly, even though they grinned at you rather than with you, even though mocking and malicious. Suddenly Norah thought: If there could be such a thing as a black sun, it would be like this man's eyes.

Now he looked at her, his eyes traveling up and down her body. As used to the stares of men as she was, Norah felt she had never known so intense or complete a scrutiny. No detail

was missed by those fierce eyes. He had undressed her, coldly and brazenly. He seemed to be searching. For what? she suddenly wondered. Strength or weakness? Then she realized there was a difference. The personality of the observer could be tapped by knowing which of the two he searched for.

Finally he spoke. They were strange words, heightened in strangeness because they were said from everything GI, and, like his eyes, audaciously poetic.

He indicated her body with a nod.

"Only a god," he said, "a man god, could have made that."

Then he grinned, and she knew now, without doubt, he attacked at you, not with you. And Norah wondered what was behind, and what was to come from, that "made" remark. Looking at his mocking face, a shadow of panic passed over her. She reached out, took the medicine glass from him, and muttered, "Thank you, God." But he had already returned to the magazine. As she walked away, now angry, she did not see him lower the paper, or his black eyes, now bubbling with laughter, or know that he, with the enlisted aid of the ward, saluted her with a long, two-note whistle—the whistle that was the immortal symbol of the mortal GIs.

The following day, during working hours, Norah found herself constantly thinking about Bill Hervey. She had tried to dismiss him with the cliché, "Fresh son of a bitch!" but somehow neither the man nor what he had said could be dismissed.

"Only a god, a man god, could have made that."

Hervey, Norah admitted, had a new line. It had imaginative force. It stung her into awareness of him, and this, she now suspected, was calculated, created to move him into her direct focus, a target for all her thoughts and emotions. She turned, looked again in the mirror.

"Only a god . . ."

Hervey was being smart at the old game, the parrying and jockeying for top position between man and woman. He was out to dominate. And dominance, she was sure, whether it was tender, ruthless or unaware, was the dominance of the seducer, not the lover. Norah, now uncomfortable, felt that Hervey had, in one swift and easy movement, a terse exclamation, succeeded in creating himself the Achillean arrow, and he would plunge that arrow when he got damn good and ready.

As the day advanced she kept repeating that she must watch out, watch out. This character was no ordinary GI. With the average she could relax, be generous with the tenderness and sentimentality she liked to put out. But not with this bastard. His eyes had warned her. Attractive as they were, the magnet-

ism they held would draw her until he held her soul in the middle of his big hand, and his maliciousness would mock pitilessly.

After the first hours Norah stopped thinking about what was in Hervey, now devoting herself to what was on him. Mostly she remembered his lips. The strangeness of it all was that the cruelty they held drew her inordinately. She knew better than to try and fathom this. Then she realized she was impatient for the evening, that she might justify herself by possessing reasonable enough excuse to visit the ward.

She was afraid. It was the most compelling repulsion she had ever known.

And again she said, "Son of a bitch!"

Arriving at the ward, Norah fought not to look in the direction of the last corner bed. For a while she talked to the nurse, then took the tray of medicines, the rubbing-alcohol bottle, and started the rounds.

"What do you know, Rutkowski?"

"Plenty."

"Then give."

He laughed. "Hell, no."

"Why?"

"You'd slap my face."

The Magee kiss followed.

"When are they sending you home? You're ruining my reputation."

Magee said, "Don't you just love to be ruined?"

"Well, that way life does have its moments."

"I bet you were a killer in civies."

"I got around."

Rutkowski shouted, "Don't tell us, Sarge. Invite us."

To the third man, "Well look who's here! The sleeping beauty is awake at last."

He held up his hand. "God's sake, Sarge! No more of that damned sodium amytal."

"Only one a night now." She looked at his tag. "Cokinos, Martin."

"Marty to you, Sarge."

"Haven't I heard that name before?"

"If you ever read the sports columns I guess you have. I was a fighter. Welterweight."

"That's right. I remember now. Marty Cokinos. You're from Philly?"

"Yeah."

Looking at him, observing the regularity of his features, Norah asked, "How is it you didn't get knocked around?"

He shrugged, his nonchalance a little too precise. "Some fighters don't get knocked around."

"You really mean good fighters, don't you?"

His grin stretched, pleased by her compliment. "That's right."

"Weren't you a champion?"

"No. I never lost a fight though. I might have been champ, but the war interrupted."

"Going back to fighting?"

"Can't. Too old. Besides, I got hit."

"I'm sorry."

"I was too. Not now though."

"What will you do?"

"There's not much I can do. Stay in the Army, I guess."

"I see." She paused and looked at the chart. "You're scheduled for a back-rub, Cokinos."

Again his grin stretched. "That's fine by me. Let's go."

He removed his pajama top, turned and lay on his stomach. Norah poured the liquid on his back, began to spread it, her hand moving over the corrugated muscles. She noticed how sharp was the V of his back, how broad his shoulders were. Norah smiled softly as she saw the picture in her mind. Apollo had a serving maid.

She took her time as she worked, and neither of them spoke. When he finally turned, his gratitude was a long intent look.

Hervey had watched the incident. The mockery in his black eyes seemed to spill over. Norah, inexplicably turning, caught that laugh. She felt that the devil himself had wagged an admonishing finger in her face. Again she silently swore.

The next man was Loomis. He was an emaciated, mole-faced individual who believed he was quite a killer. Loomis also was scheduled for a back-rub.

She spoke abruptly. "Turn over."

He looked at her, a knowing, confident, intimate look. She wanted to smash the bottle over his head.

The rub rapidly completed, she went on.

Hervey sat up in bed and watched her approach. The mockery was still in his eyes, and seeing it, she became angry.

After giving him his medicine, she sat herself on his bed and looked defiantly at him.

Hervey questioned, "This a call?"

"Yes."

He had said, "This a call?" He had said that with his voice, but his eyes asked: So you challenge? And the mocking laugh-

ter added a menace: Okay, but remember, Norah Calhoon, the devil take the hindmost.

His audacity shook her. She could not decide if it were conceit, hope in his prowess, or confidence, knowing his prowess.

He began. It was a quiet, seemingly idle statement, and only the way he held his lips warned her of its significance. She knew she could get up and walk away, because it was no fun to be hindmost. The devil, when he slapped, slapped terribly hard. But she settled herself. And there'd be no regrets. Because she'd been warned. The cruelty in his lips had done that.

So she stayed, knowing she could not have gotten up and walked away.

"Norah Calhoon."

"What?"

"You're an artist."

"What are you sounding off about now?"

"An artist in voluptuousness."

"Go on. Let's hear this snow-job."

"I watched you tonight. I saw how you alcohol-rubbed Cokinos. You took ten minutes. Then you moved to Loomis. Here you took three."

"What are you driving at?"

"Cokinos—he's beautiful. Loomis now—he's a broomstick of a man."

Stung, she fiercely whispered, "What are you trying to do? Convince me I'm a whore?"

His grin filled his face and he spread his hands. "The suggestion came from you."

She breathed hard, and reluctantly, silently, admitted that round one was Hervey's.

"An artist," he continued. "Your emotions are your brushes. Your canvas your imagination. Your paints your awareness. And I don't blame you for spending ten minutes on Cokinos' back. If I were you, I would have done the same. And if I were a woman, I'd probably be a whore."

She threw him a venomous glance, but he blandly continued.

"Why shouldn't you spend ten minutes on his back? He excited you, didn't he? He's what makes you aware?" Seeing her look, he said, "Don't get so mad. You're only doing what dancers do, using their bodies as the instrument of art. I do the same myself. With me it's—well—the way a woman rumbas her rear, the line of a shoulder, neck, breast, leg. Awareness, and the awareness of awareness. This gives to life an I'm-so-goddam-glad-I'm-alive feeling."

She thought about what he had said. Finally, hesitatingly, she asked, "How, what are you building to, Hervey?"

The moment she had spoken she regretted the question, realizing then that she had laid herself wide open.

The maliciousness returned to his eyes. He laughed.

"Spoken like a true woman." The sneer was evident. "The inference is: It's a build-up. A build-up to what? And how will the build-up affect me?"

Her hands trembled and in one second, she was sure, her anger would break and she would call him a son of a bitch. She knew if he had been a WAC, she would have called him that long ago.

"What do you want me to say? What do you expect?" he asked. "Lesson number one in How to Seduce in Three Easy Lessons?"

It could be that, she told herself.

Again he laughed. "Norah Calhoon, that's your problem."

She opened her mouth, but before she could reply, he interrupted, "I'm tired. Go to bed. And—"

"And what?"

"Good night, Norah Calhoon."

2

NORAH could not sleep that night because of the rage that choked her. In fantasy she slapped his face a hundred times, and when he yelped in pain she dug her nails deeper into her clenched palms. She twisted and turned, trying to shut out the haunting picture of his black eyes and finely chiseled lips, but persistently they moved closer to her. In her anxiety, she forgot all about her buddy who slept in the upper bunk.

Mayme stuck her head over the edge of the bed and growled, "For God's sake, Norah, quit wriggling like you've got to have a man, will you? Hell, how do you think I can sleep?"

"Sorry, Mayme."

"You sick or something?"

"No."

"What's wrong then?"

"Just that some smart GI got fresh tonight and I'm burning."

The head disappeared and almost immediately Mayme lowered herself into the bottom berth. "Move over. Tell me about it."

Moving, Norah asked, "Got a cigarette?"

"Here. I'll have one too."

Mayme said, "Must have been a pretty good guy."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, have you ever come to bed since you enlisted without some smart GI getting fresh? Like hell you have! But to get burned up about it—!" A shrug completed the sentence. Mayme laughed. "Don't tell me somebody has finally got wise to the kiss-the-Norah-Calhoon-fanny psychology? I always did tell you it was the phoniest thing I ever struck."

"You're nuts!"

"Okay, so I'm nuts. Then why are you burning?"

"He made me mad."

"Tell me more such wisdom. Tell me Roosevelt's president. Tell me—"

"Shut up."

"The padre ain't around, honey. You'll have to weep on Madre Mayme's shoulder tonight."

"Quit it, will you?"

"If you tell me about it."

"I've told you all there is to tell."

"Good-looking guy?"

"Not particularly."

"But he appealed to you?"

"Well—"

"He appealed to you all right."

Norah said, "He does have beautiful eyes."

"You always were a sucker for eyes."

"Nice mouth, too."

"And—"

"Powerful build."

"And—?"

"A voice."

"Hell, not a crooner? Norah, you're slipping!"

"No, idiot. Speaking voice. Deep. Bass. Sort of sonorous."

Mayme asked, "Like a caress?"

"You know him?"

"Honey, I haven't the faintest idea."

"Then, why—?"

"I've been around. What else did he have?"

"Isn't that enough? Who do you want? Adonis himself?"

"Just give me one of those attributes, honey, and I'll show you if that's enough."

"It's two o'clock in the morning. Be serious, will you?"

"At two o'clock in the morning I can never be serious unless I have a man in bed with me."

"I swear you've got the soul of a prostitute, Mayme."

"Yes, isn't it tragic? The soul of a prostitute and the body of a rhinoceros. That's nature's idea of a joke. Sort of seven-come-eleven with genes."

"You don't look like a rhinoceros."

"That or a whale. I can never quite decide."

Norah began to giggle. "Stop it, Mayme."

"You're the one who'd better stop it. First thing you know, one of these bitches around here will see us in bed together and we'll find ourselves on report. Couple of Lesbians in the outfit."

"You slay me."

"About this man now."

"Well, he really did burn my ass."

"You lucky girl."

And the giggles began again.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. He's too much like you and—"

"The poor bastard."

"—and he has a comeback for everything I say. He twists more than words. He can guess my mood. Then he'll meet it, laugh and throw it back in my face. You know he's sneering all the time."

"At what?"

"Everything, I guess. Especially me. The way I think. The way I act. The way I feel."

"But not the way you look?"

"I don't know. He plays with you—the cat-and-mouse game. God, you don't have to strip. And it's then you know he's aching to have you. I tell you, Mayme, I just burn."

"Sure now?"

"What do you mean?"

"What do you burn at? Do you burn because you feel that he might make you? Or do you burn because he's so damn sure he'll make you?"

"Well—"

"I thought so."

"Now, look here!"

"Don't look-here me, Norah Calhoon. God, what a hypocrite you are."

"You're stepping out—"

"You don't burn at anything but the man's honesty."

"I resent—"

"I'm an old woman, Norah."

"Every day of thirty-five."

"That's quite a lot when put against your twenty-two."

Norah turned her head. "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry."

The big woman accepted the apology by softening her tone. "I'll lay you any money he's a wise GI. And I mean wise in the old sense. He can't be a kid again. He left all that coy stuff back in his adolescence. Now he sees a woman. He wants that woman. And I bet you he's man enough to take that woman."

Norah looked startled.

"All right now," said Mayme. "Just wait." She laughed. "You won't have to wait long. Just until he gets on his feet."

"I'm no Yoshiwara gal for horny GIs."

"Nobody is saying you are."

"Then—"

"But you've been with a man before."

"Well, but that was different."

Mayme laughed loudly. "Sure. They fooled around first. Talked soft and made all kinds of promises. What we call a line of bull.

"I knew they were lying."

"Sure. But it satisfied something in you. Those lies served their purpose. The approach. You didn't lose face so much that way. You kept part of what is called respectability. When it was all over, and not just because you'd been made a fool of, you despised the guy, and you despised yourself. If you gave in at the end, it's because you wanted to in the beginning. But the game had to be played. Advances were made. Advances were rejected. Finally, when you'd delayed long enough, when you felt you'd earned respect, you dropped your little pants."

Norah remained silent.

"I've played the game myself too long. I know. So don't try to fool me, or yourself, by saying he burned you up. Why, you're just itching to get over there."

"I'm not, I'm not."

"Okay. So you just happened to notice his eyes and his lips and his build and his voice. Just happened to notice in passing."

She laughed, and Norah knew it was maliciousness like Hervey's. She felt completely miserable.

Mayme asked, "Who is this man? I'd like to meet him."

"You're crazy if you think I'm going to tell you."

Sharply, Mayme said, "Stop that," and looking down at Norah's figure, its appealing curves softly reflecting the night light, Mayme added, "Hell, honey, I'm no competition for that. It's just that I'd like to meet this unique individual. My God, I haven't met an honest man in twenty years."

Norah said, "Hervey. That's his name. Bill Hervey. He's an infantry sergeant. Ward 17. Botton left corner."

"Thanks."

Norah turned restlessly. "What am I going to do, Mayme?"

Gently Mayme asked, "What do you want to do, honey?"

Norah did not reply.

"Then," grinned Mayme, "go ahead and do it," and as a parting shot, added, "Anyway, you probably won't have a chance. Not if he's really honest and a man."

3

"HELLO, Norah Calhoon."

"Hello, Hervey."

"How are you?"

"Fine. And you?"

"I'm fine too."

"I had a visitor today."

"Mayme?"

"Yes."

Norah smiled.

Hervey said, "I liked Mayme."

"She's my buddy."

"Quite a pal to have around."

"She sure is."

Hervey grinned. "She has all the things I like in a woman, and none of the things I like around a woman."

"What are those things?"

"In or around?"

"In, of course."

"Sharp and clean. Not messed up with sentimentality."

"Like I am?"

"You'll get over it. You're young."

"I wish people would stop telling me that."

"Mayme been at you?"

"Sort of." Then, apprehensively. "She didn't tell you anything, did she?"

He raised his brows. "Was there something she could have told me?" He laughed, and for the first time that evening a touch of malice crept into his eyes. "Were you talking to her last night?"

"What on earth about?"

"One of those woman-to-woman talks maybe."

"Don't be silly."

"No, all she said was that she'd heard of a son of a bitch in Ward 17. And, being partial to bitches' sons, had to look him up. Said that it brought out the maternal in her, among other things."

Norah began to breathe relief, then abruptly stopped. Instantly his eyes shot at her, now all maliciousness. "So you were having your T.S. card punched last night?"

She flared, "It's none of your goddam business what I did last night."

Surprisingly, he answered softly. "No, that's right. It's none of my business what you did—" and here he barely emphasized the next word "—*last* night."

She started. The whispered menace behind *last* alarmed her. She changed the subject quickly.

"When do you think you'll get better?"

"My Lord! Give me a chance. I've been here only three days." And inevitably, "Trying to get rid of me?"

She rapidly blinked her eyes. She thought: If I weep now I'll kill him.

Then he leaned forward, took her small hand in his. The huge calloused hand completely enveloped it. He started to talk, at the same time caressing her knuckles with the heel of his hand.

"An artist in voluptuousness," he said softly, and, amazed, Norah saw that all the maliciousness had gone from his eyes. "A woman, and a little girl too. The little girl wants a build-up, a major campaign—to quiet the fool in her, to by-pass fear. But the woman says: There is no law but the law of anarchy . . . *I want this woman,* or, *I want this man.* Simple. Spontaneous. Without the garbage of talk."

Now that Norah saw the menace was not directed at her, she leaned against the bed rail and relaxed.

She wished, idly, that his voice were not so mellow, so resonantly and deeply pitched. If it weren't, and if it had been rough and common, she thought, she could have listened better to what he said rather than how he said it.

"Talk isn't decent. At least, in the beginning it's not. The beginning belongs to flesh. Let soul come later. Love's too big and complex a mystery to have it all pat on the line the first night. Hell, that way, no two would ever get to bed."

Norah lowered her gaze, and slyly began to concentrate on what she had been only able to glance at briefly. His feet were, as most men's feet, ugly. Rapidly she shifted her gaze and,

traveling up, saw the high calf, the long athletic thigh. Maybe, she told herself, maybe she was crazy, but she seemed to sense the resentment of that thigh. . . . As though the strict line, the beauty of its structure wanted to burst through his pajamas into observation.

Hervey's pajama bottoms! she thought—they were a shroud over a Michaelangelo.

"Build-ups are the work of little mice. Got to be sure the skyscraper will stand even before the blueprint's begun. But you, Norah Calhoun—you're not a little mouse. You're strong, really, deep inside you. So don't ask for phoney things. Don't make a man lose his sex. Don't prostitute yours."

Norah, her chin sunk on her chest, her arms embracing her knees, listened—feeling his voice wrapping itself around her until at last she felt she were living in a place that was all Hervey's voice. Now it wasn't malice. Now it was warmth and strength, and she secure in its impregnable might. And when her attention wavered, the mood's continuity was carried by the hypnotism of the draped thighs.

Norah could not decide which she liked best.

"You love awareness. And what is love to you, Norah Calhoon, but the worship of awareness? Sure, later it will be other things, but not now in the beginning. For when we're still half-child the other things are of minor nature. So let's be generous, as the sun is generous. Let's live and give, let's share and grow, tall and deep. All this, without fear. You don't need to fear, not when the man is tender. For there's more strength in one tender kiss than a million nights of passion."

What was he saying? What did it matter? She was made warm and complete by his presence. That was enough. What he had said, the meaning of his meaning, could come later.

He talked on, telling her of herself and himself, and the alliance they shared.

Norah sat quite still, watching him, and it was then that she remembered what Mayme had said:

"Anyway, you probably won't have a chance. Not if he's really honest and a man."

But still she watched.

He talked until the medic interrupted. Walking down the aisle of the ward, the man shouted, "Okay, okay. Lights out. Quiet for the night." He looked pointedly at Norah and Hervey. "All mosquito nets down."

Hervey asked, "You have to have them down?" For when the net was down, it made an exchange of talk almost impossible. The net was a barrier that removed the intimacy.

"Sorry, Sarge."

"Relax for once," Hervey suggested.

"Can't be done." And before the sergeant's suddenly savage face, "Hell, Sarge, you've been in the Army long enough. You know how it is. Too much brass walking around doing nothing but checking."

"What brass? Checking what? The patients?"

"Medical administrative brass. Mostly checking mosquito security. No, not the patients. This is a fairly quiet ward. At night the doctors only come when called by the nurse or aid-man."

"Where's the nurse now?"

"Supper."

"How many aid-men on duty at night?"

"One."

"You?"

"Yes. Me. Why?"

But Hervey had turned to Norah, and in an undertone said, "Outside the ward—if you walk oceanwards—there's a big bamboo clump. Know it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Go there and wait. If I'm not there in ten minutes, forget all this."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"Don't ask questions." His eyes were bright and commanding. "Do as I say."

The tenderness had vanished. The maliciousness was back, sparkling in his excited eyes.

"Go on, go on," he commanded.

In her mind she swore, and she wished she had the power to tell the suddenly imperious sergeant to go to hell. But she had not. His excitement had touched her, and his force was hitting her again and again. Mayme's warning shouted in her ears, but it was as nothing before the dark compelling eyes, the voice and thighs. She did manage to convey a reluctance as she answered, "Well—maybe."

Norah turned as she opened the door. Hervey was speaking rapidly and earnestly to the medic. She saw the aid-man suddenly grin, gesture, apparently as to some direction. Hervey grinned with him, slapped him affectionately on the back, then she was outside.

He joined her shortly after she arrived at the rendezvous. He was still wearing pajamas. Taking her arm, he said, "Let's go."

Norah protested vehemently. "In pajamas! You're crazy! The first aid or brass or security guard will pick you up and

take you in. Besides," she indicated the ward, "you'll be missed. The nurse will find out, and then there'll be hell to pay."

"No, we sort of fixed the bed."

"When you return she'll see you."

"I'll tell her I had to go to the john."

"You an ambulatory patient?"

"Yes. And if anyone else sees us, same excuse." He added, "Thank God for the eternal john."

"Where are you going? The beach?"

"No. The aid is quartered in a pup tent. He says we can use that."

"We?" She struggled to express indignation. "You seem to be taking a lot for granted."

"Am I?"

Though she could not see him, she knew his eyes were filled with mocking amusement.

"You certainly are."

He stepped close, and she caught the sudden slight odor of him. He took her wrists, pulled her to him, and under the pajama jacket encircled her arms around his waist. He released her hands to embrace her. She did not withdraw. After the kiss, after he had repeated his mocking, "Am I?" she, quite unhappy, though obedient, accompanied him to the tent.

They arrived at the tent without incident. Hervey opened the flap, lifted the netting, and on bended knees they passed inside.

"Some home sweet home," Hervey said. Suddenly he laughed. "I feel like making the sign of the cross and singing 'Bless this House, O Lord Our God!' "

Feeling that she ought to say something, Norah answered, "Well, at least we'll have no mosquitoes pestering us."

"The beach must be hell for that."

She told herself, fiercely whispering her thoughts to her heart, that she should not have come. Exactly why she should not have come, she couldn't say. At the particular moment it was without logic, but it was there, a fragile thread of fear.

Watching him, she saw by the inadequate light the slow and fluent grace of his movements. She felt the play of goose pimples over her body; her head reeled. Somehow the nature of his nonchalance had, by its very adroitness, caught her and placed her where she wanted to be placed.

Quite casually he had removed his pajamas. Norah saw that he did that without conceit or shame, not brazenly, not even

slyly, but as he would have removed a hat or a tie. Her fear still grew, but now because she knew it would be crushed.

Looking down, Norah saw that she had been right. The pajamas had been a shroud over a Michaelangelo. Her eyes traveled over the broad shoulders, the abdominal wall, the chest packed firm and hard. Yet always she returned to the sinewy thighs.

As he leaned on her and wrapped his arms around her, she pressed upwards, fiercely thrusting herself against his thighs.

It made her curiously both sad and happy to whisper his name again and again, a whisper that held every emotion, urging him to speed and tenderness, to savagery and consummation. But all she actually said was, "Bill . . . Bill . . . Bill . . ."

The shuddering was over but the ecstasy remained. They held each other close. Hervey kissed her and said, "Beautiful, Norah."

"What, Bill?"

"You. Us here. This."

"Yes."

"This pup tent . . . it's like a pocket. Something we crept into and escaped from the monster outside . . . always outside . . . the war."

"I know."

They fell silent, their thoughts toying with them. Norah especially hugged the content to her. It was good to have the hunger fed, now to drift on the sea of communion. Idly she caressed him, still paying homage. She ran her hand over his body, sometimes brushed and sometimes crushed her lips against his mouth, his eyes, his throat.

"Happy?" he asked.

Her eyes filled with sudden tears. She pulled his head down, his lips to her tears. "Happy?" she parried. "Perhaps that's its name. I don't know."

"What do you feel?"

"I don't know how to describe it. So much feeling. Everything poured into nothing and back again. I feel good until I remember how brief all this is."

"Always relative. We can take happiness and make out as long as we separate it, keep it in a parenthesis all by itself. We do fine then. But the moment we align it with permanence! —then watch how the situation changes."

"You want me to forget tomorrow?"

"You'll have to. For your own peace you'll have to. Sure, forget it. Lord's sake, we'll probably all be dead before the

war's over anyway. And we—you and I—we're doing okay right now."

"Having a wonderful time."

"I'll say." His grin filled his face. "Best piece of ass I ever had."

She laughed richly and hugged him tight. "Oh, Bill, I love you for that."

"Greatest compliment you ever had."

"Never came any better—or choicer."

Norah ran her fingers through his hair, and then began lightly to massage his neck.

"You know something, Bill?"

"What?"

"You were right. This is a pocket. And it's wonderful. I know it can't last forever, but—"

"No, it can't."

"But inside me it will last."

He did not answer. He held her tighter.

"Right now," Norah said, "I'm wishing something."

"What?"

"I wish when you squeeze me, like you did a moment ago, I could sink inside you."

"That's a strange thing to say."

"But I do wish it. Don't you see, then, once inside you, it would be forever?"

"How?"

"I'd be your heart."

They kissed, lightly at first, then, because time had elapsed, ardently. It surprised and pleased them. They clung to each other, fierce and glad, with no thought of the specter of tomorrow. Norah especially did not want tomorrow; nothing but now, and now suspended forever.

Three weeks later he said to her, "I'm leaving tomorrow. Going back. Rejoining my outfit."

"I've been waiting for you to tell me."

"You knew?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"The nurse told me, yesterday."

"Oh!" It was both exclamation and question.

"It's okay. She's know about us since the first night. She's no fool."

Contrite, he said, "I'm sorry. Will it get you in any trouble? Embarrass you at all?"

"If there were going to be trouble, it would have come before now."

"I guess so."

"The nurse is okay. She'll keep her mouth shut. After all, she's done the same herself. She's really a swell person."

"Sure is."

"Embarrassed? That's silly."

"Should be."

Defiantly she shouted, "It is, it is."

"Okay, I believe you."

"I suppose I'm a fool to admit it, but, well, it's going to hurt pretty bad when you go."

"Thank you."

"You don't have to go."

"What do you mean?"

She made an impatient gesture. "Nothing is secret around here. I know you asked to be returned to your outfit."

He did not reply.

"You didn't have to ask. You could have stayed here another month."

"The wound is healed."

"But you're sick. You've been in combat too long. You're tired. I know, I watched you. You need the rest. Really, you should be evacuated to the States."

"I know."

"Then why—?"

"I have to go back."

"Why? God's sake, why?"

"You wouldn't understand."

Bitingly she retorted. "Thank you," then, after a pause, "You could try to tell me."

"I have to go back. Each day I spend here I feel like a deserter."

"That's ridiculous."

"No, it isn't. It's the way I feel." He paused before adding, "This isn't conceit, but my squad sort of depend on me."

Norah did not reply. The validity of his remark struck her with almost physical force. Slowly her panic built.

At last she said, "What am I going to do?"

"Do?"

"Yes."

"What can you do but keep on as you have been doing?"

"Just getting by?"

"Few do more than that."

"It's no satisfaction."

"I know, but—" He shrugged, and his shrug completed the sentence. Lying by her side, he reached out and fondled her breast. His voice softened and grew tender.

"Norah, honey, whatever you want, I doubt if you'll get it until after the war."

Her voice weary, she answered, "Yes, I know." Then hotly, "But I'm sick. I'm goddam sick."

"Sick? Sick of what?"

"Oh!" Her voice tired. "All this here today and gone tomorrow. You meet somebody. You like him. In spite of hell sometimes you like him. Maybe because you feel sorry for him. You know he's going back into combat, so—" Her voice trailed into silence.

He completed her sentence. "So you put out."

Barely audible, she answered. "Yes—sometimes—yes."

"You regret that?"

She thought before replying, "No."

"Norah."

"What?"

"You carry your compassion to sentimental limits."

"Is that what they call it now? Compassion? You're kind, Bill. Thanks. Usually, afterwards, it's a sneer and—and whore. Some guys think you just live to do it."

"Don't you?"

"Damn you, no."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure."

"Think now. Be honest."

She hesitated. "Well—mostly no—but sometimes—sometimes yes."

"Sometimes when it's guys like Cokinos?"

"Cokinos?"

"The fighter from Philly. The man whose back you rubbed so well."

"Yes, guys like Cokinos." She paused, then said, "You know what, Bill?"

"What?"

"It's awful."

"What's awful?"

"This sex business."

"Why?"

"Once you start it's so damned hard to stop."

In the darkness he grinned. "I too discovered that. Long ago."

"I suppose it's the only way to live."

"It does help. Brings one closer to completeness."

"Is that all?"

"That's plenty. And after all, the beauty is understood from the beginning."

"The question is though, what to do about it?"

"What can be done? As you said, with all this here today and gone tomorrow, there's nothing that can be done. Just wait. Wait for the end of the war."

"Meanwhile, take it easy. Don't fall in love. Because the guy is going back into combat, or he'll be evacuated to the States. And it's so easy to fall. This whole place is a set-up for just that."

"I know."

"And even with all the WACs and GIs around, it's still lonely." She looked at him. "Bill—"

"What?"

"Do you understand that?"

"Yes, I understand. You can't get over the loneliness."

She ignored the thrust. "There's such a trading back and forth of sympathy. But—I don't know. I think it's all so goddam phoney. Anyway, a guy comes along. He's cute. He shoots a line. You know the bastard is lying. But do you give a damn? Hell, no. He's a man. And you're a woman. And always, inside you, you feel that unanswerable tug."

"Unanswerable?"

"Sure. Unanswerable except for consummation. Oh, well, somehow or other you find yourself with him, on the beach. Bill, you can't win. Even though you know damn well he's only after one thing."

"And you?"

"Sure. Me too. Also after one thing. But you lie to yourself. You try and kid yourself. Then you give up and laugh at yourself. As Confucius said: If rape is inevitable, lie back and enjoy it. That's what it is, Bill. Rape. Your body raping your soul. And when it's all over, you remember what you were taught at home. So you say to yourself: Enough of that; no more." She mirthlessly laughed. "Hell of a lot of good that does." She moved closer to him, fiercely wrapped her arms around him. "I tell you, Bill, you can't win. You simply can't. The moment a halfway attractive man lays his hands on you, you're a dead pigeon. A man's hands! The woman that can fight them can't be normal." Restlessly she turned. "And this climate! God knows that's against you. You have to fight it, Bill, even though you get nowhere, because it's just one hurt after another."

"What do you want, Norah?"

"Don't you know?'"

"Sure. But I want to hear it from you."

"I want a man. One goddam good man. My man. For keeps. Oh, yes. That's the important thing. For keeps."

"And a home and kids I suppose?"

"They would help. But the man is the important thing right now. He's the one I'll love. Having him all the time. Learning about him. Loving him a little more each day. Not having to say goodbye every month—like a divorce about twelve times a year."

"Do you think you'll get it?"

"Damn right I'll get—not it—him. What I don't know about men now isn't worth knowing."

"You're confident."

"I'm beautiful."

"Check!"

She laughed.

"What type of guy?"

She snuggled close to him. "Don't you know?"

He grinned. "No. But I'm beginning to catch on mighty fast."

"I didn't know for the longest time."

"Tell me."

"Well, it's like this. First, I want him beautiful. That is, beautiful to me. He must be, for I get fascinated watching a man move."

Dryly he said, "So I've noticed."

"I can't help it," she remonstrated. "It's the way I'm made and how the Army has changed me."

Tenderly he said, "I'm not reproaching you. You know that."

"But you are judging."

"No, my dear."

"Honest?"

He slapped her buttocks. "Honest, you idiot," then, as she was silent, encouraged, "Go on, I'm listening."

"No."

"Now don't pout."

"I'm not. Really I'm not. It's that I'm thinking about us. The fact that this—our knowing each other—is over."

"Hurts?"

"Damn you, yes."

"I'm sorry."

She laughed, but it was wholly gesture and without spontaneity. "Don't be. I wouldn't have it undone."

"Then I'll be glad."

"Sure. Be glad, Bill. Always be glad when you think of us."

"I will." He grinned, hesitated, then grinned again.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well—this—to misquote friend Tolstoi—has been a sort of Peace in War."

After her laughter had subsided, she said, "And do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"Bill Hervey—" Her laughter died and her voice was suddenly gentle. "Bill Hervey, you're a son of a bitch, the world's prize bastard, and—"

"Come on: And what?"

"—and I love you."

Hurriedly she buried her face against his neck and on his shoulder. Then, startlingly, a terrible and magnificent quiet had descended. He did not reply, and time slipped by, unheeded by anyone in the world but Norah—or so it seemed. The breakers yawned, piled slowly high, came falling, falling, falling, whipped the beach—a crack of sound whose echoes merged to become a boom, split the water in savage delight, and the sea sprinted madly forward—a billion trotting ponies with manes of ethereal silver. Man's seed fused with woman's egg, children were born, cried, laughed, loved, hated, aged and died. The wind whittled away the mountains and the oceans ate the land. And still she waited.

His arms pinioned her, his lips sought her lips. "You fool! You goddam stupid little fool!"

After she had swallowed the hurt, "You—don't love me?"

He almost shouted, "No."

"Why so sure—why so defiant, Bill?"

"Because I don't want that."

"—don't want my love?"

"That's right."

"Bill—!"

"Oh, it could be so easy to love you. You're beautiful and feminine. You're gentle and tender, have a softness that will always get you hurt. You need your guy, your goddam good guy. And I wish I could be he. I wish I could."

"Bill, you've got me all mixed—"

"No. Wrong tense, honey. I haven't got you. I've had you."

"I didn't mean—"

"I know what you meant. You don't have to tell me. You spoke of confusion. I spoke cynically."

"Oh!"

"Don't be like that. It isn't fair to me. You see—"

"What?"

"I adore you."

"Bill."

Again he shouted. "No. Don't say *Bill* like that. Stop putting me over a barrel. I adore, I said. Not love."

"I don't see any diff—"

"Where I'm concerned there's a difference. I can't love you. All I can give you is my adoration, but not my hurt. Something won't let me part with that. I'm afraid."

"You? Afraid?"

"Yes."

"Why?" Stricken, she demanded, "God Almighty, why?"

Then he began to weep. They were soft and long sobs. She drew close to him, took his head and rested it on her breasts, stroked his hair.

Minutes afterwards, when he had recovered a little, he said, "Christ, O Christ! That wasn't necessary."

"It doesn't matter."

He shook his head. "What's wrong with me?"

"You're tired, still worn out from combat."

"I guess that's it. I am tired, and fed up and sick. Perhaps—that's why—why I—"

"What?"

"I seem to be haunted. All around me are people, faces, men that were in my squad."

Quietly she asked, "Dead?"

He nodded. "They came overseas with me. Some of them did. Some were replacements."

"You couldn't stop their dying."

"I don't know. Maybe better leadership might have. But—" He shrugged. "And when they died—I know this is silly, but I can't help it—when they died, I felt as if a little of me died too." He pleaded, "Don't you see? This is what I mean when I say something won't let me part with my hurt. And not being able to give you my hurt, I can't love you." His voice a whisper, "I've been so close so often—will be again—I've got to go back. They didn't all die. Some of them are still living—and waiting."

"Waiting for you?"

He nodded.

"Can't they die alone?" And instantly she regretted the question, so she hurried to add, "Don't—you don't have to answer." Looking at him, remembering the first night, the thighs and the lips and the eyes, Norah had her answer. Suddenly she felt bitter against such nobility, for now she knew nobility

was the most venomous of all the bitchy angels. And more—contagious. For now she could never play her last trump. Her hand quickly went against her stomach, as though her gesture would protect, and yet stop, the new life already begun.

His voice a flat monotone, Hervey said, "Mine has got to come. So I daren't love you."

She almost cried aloud in anguish.

"There's nothing you can do, Norah," he said. "Nothing at all. That's the god-awful part of war. Neither you nor anybody can say or do anything. You see, it's not just the fighting and the dying. It would be easy if that were all. But it isn't. Before the dying comes so much. A guy lives on fear. Not a fear of dying, but a fear that you're going to miss so much—a million things you've wanted so badly—life, humanity, and what you could do with this miracle that's you. It's so stupid that you're going to die. Makes you scream and burn inside. You know there's no fairness, no justice, no wisdom, no dignity any more. Man has nothing. And then you begin to wonder. When in God's name did he have something? Who can answer that?" He began to laugh, hysterically. "I'll tell you who can. The silence of the world can. And that has always been negative, positive only in its mute and shamed admission—its guilt. The misery of the world can, and the tears, and the dead, and the torn. Negative, that's what they'd say." His voice rose. "Negative, negative, negative." He found the word fascinating, and began to mouth it, repeating its three syllables in rapid succession. "Sounds like the rhythm of train wheels." He experimented, laughing harshly now. "There's a simile for you. Not a train, but the globe. That's its rhythm. Negative, negative, negative. Listen!" He restlessly moved his excited body. "Can't you hear it?" Triumphantly he yelled, "There it is! There it is!"

She screamed, "Stop it! Do you hear me? Stop it!"

"But don't you hear it? Don't you feel it?"

"No. And neither do you."

"You must feel something."

"I feel only your heart beating."

He made an elaborate gesture. "So, now it's spread to me." He laughed wildly. Norah lifted her hand, opened her palm and with all her strength struck his face. Sharply he recoiled from her, but immediately calmed. When he was completely quiet, he muttered, "I'm sorry."

Tersely she said, "Forget it."

For many minutes neither of them spoke. Finally she turned to him.

"Bill."

"What?"

"You said this was our last night?"

"That's right."

"How much time have we left?"

He looked at his watch. "Two hours."

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"Then kiss me, Bill. Once more. Because soon you'll be gone. And *gone* is such a long time."

"Norah. Norah, honey."

"Don't talk, my darling. Just kiss me—that tender kiss you once spoke of. Remember?" Now her voice was thick and broken, barely able to speak for the love that choked her. *"There's more strength in one tender kiss than a million nights of passion."* God knew she would need all that strength.

"Norah, I—"

She looked at him. "Adore will do, Bill. Nothing more is—"

"I do though. I do so—"

But she touched his lips with her fingers, silencing him.

"You're wasting time," she whispered in his ear, chiding him. "You're wasting time, my love."

4

IT was quite light when they left the tent. Several GIs were grouped around the area. As soon as Norah and Bill appeared, they grinned with unconcealed envy, but they said nothing except what they whispered to each other. Hervey took Norah's arm, interlocked it with his, and in silence walked her to the hospital. Beside the bamboo clump where the beaten foot-tracks crossed and formed an intersection, they paused.

Holding her hand, he said, "Guess this is where we say goodbye."

"I guess so, Bill."

He squeezed her hand. "Thanks, Norah."

"You too. Thanks from me."

As he turned, she cried, "Bill!"

"Yes?"

She could not resist asking again, "Do you have to go? Do you have to go back up front?"

"Don't have to."
"But you're going?"
"Yes."
"I see."

They stood facing each other, both acutely aware of the awkwardness that gripped them. He shuffled his feet. She thought: Impatiently he shuffled his feet. So she said, "Goodbye, Bill."

"Goodbye, Norah. Goodbye, my dear." And he turned and walked rapidly away, one moment the broad, swinging back, the narrow waist, the enchanting thighs, then the ward swallowed him.

Norah turned and, holding her stomach, stumbled away, blinded by the tears that poured from her eyes.

BOOK FOUR

1

CAILINI kicked a stone. It was not a vicious kick. His hands were buried deep in his pockets, his tall gaunt body bent dejectedly forward. He had left his tent and was slowly walking around and around the area. He wanted to exhaust himself, because he knew, tired as he was, he would not be able to sleep. It would be the same tonight as it had been last night unless he did exhaust himself, his eyes wide open, staring at the triangle of sky, his thoughts deepening in melancholy. Now, as he walked, he seemed to be searching the ground, but the earth was the last thing he saw. His eyes were dull, and his steps were guided by his familiarity with the area more than his vision. A few GIs who passed him shouted greeting, but he did not reply. Around and around the wavering circle he walked, dragging his feet, stumbling against the roots of vines. He did not detour from his path when he met the monsoon puddles. Aimlessly he slouched on, then swore because he had wet his feet.

On his itching and dirty face was a beard of two days' growth. Occasionally he scratched it, and at the same time wondered why he had neither the interest nor desire to shave.

Vague thoughts passed through his mind, dream substance that evaporated as soon as it arrived.

Half an hour passed. An hour. An hour and a half. And still he walked, around and around.

He smoked cigarette after cigarette, and as his mood slowly blackened, he kicked more stones.

He had walked by Rosinski's tent. Lifting the flap and peering inside, he saw that Tuthill was the sole tenant. The man was sitting cross-legged, turning the pages of a magazine and smoking.

"What do you want?" he demanded of Cailini's inquiring stare.

"Where's Rosinski?"

"On a KP. You'll find him peeling spuds."

He had walked to the KP detail.

Rosinski saw him coming. Before Cailini's somber eyes, Rosinski quietly asked, "Something you want, Bob?"

"Got any alky?"

Sadly Rosinski shook his head. "Not a drop."

"Oh!" Then, after a pause, after a mental effort, "Know anybody who has?"

"Don't know a soul."

Again, "Oh!"

"Sorry."

Cailini nodded.

Rosinski said, "It was Hervey who always managed to get alky. Since he went we haven't—" and abruptly he stopped.

Cailini turned and walked away. Rosinski shouted after the bent and retiring figure, "If there's anything I can do?" But Cailini kept on walking.

Robins, peering from his tent, saw him, and came and paced with him. Lines of anxiety creased the squad leader's red face. Like Rosinski, he gently asked, "Something I can do?" Cailini turned and faced him. He did not speak. He did not have to. Robins read Cailini's expression: Go away! Leave me alone!

Robins returned to his tent, but now he sat outside and solemnly watched the pacing man.

Their present stay in bivouac was not yet of a week's duration, and already Cailini was ready to return to combat, combat or anything else. Just so long as it was not what they were doing now. And he knew, if they were returned to combat, he would yearn for bivouac.

He lit a cigarette from the butt of the last, the butt that was still half a cigarette. He did not notice. He escaped his misery for one small moment of time while lighting the cigarette, while doing something that occupied the nervous clenching, fingering play of his sweating hands.

Then he continued. Around and around. More stones. More puddles. More curses. And always the stifling, oppressive melancholy.

Tuthill sat cross-legged and stared at the magazine he was not reading. He was worried. Since the assignment to bivouac, he found himself seeing either the face of Adams or that of Hervey. Adams' face he did not mind at all. This came to him at nights before he went to sleep, and in the mornings as soon as he awoke. At such times he would conceal a smile, allowing the soft surge of his power to steal over him. He would slightly and voluptuously move his body, and relive the inci-

dent of the foxhole. Without any conscious effort, Adams' face floated before his eyes. He remembered it as he had last seen it, as he liked to remember it, Adams' emotion overriding his mind.

He had been such an easy conquest, Tuthill told himself. He knew, if Adams had been a woman, he would have dismissed it, because he hated such light victories. At the most he would have reserved her for the times when he needed a woman and had to have one fast. These were the ones he sought after an evening of defeat, after he had been aroused and denied. He had always kept a few of these around. He would play with them, would tantalize and torment. Yet he despised them, even though they did have that comforting ability to re-establish himself warmly as himself.

But Adams had not been a woman, and strangely, indefinably, this light conquest was not easy to dismiss. He had not immediately relegated Adams to that despised stand-by group. Drawing from habit, he had intended to, but struck by a new force, he had not. The memory of Adams persisted. He found himself invariably returning to that last night of combat, especially at night and in the early mornings. At such times he had slyly inspected his tent partner, Rosinski, and if the man were asleep with his face turned the other way, Tuthill would press his stomach against the Philippine earth, would relive the incident. Once he had gone too far, and had masturbated. The passion had swiftly enveloped him, and the orgasm had taken place almost before he realized what was happening.

For a brief moment panic hit him. Then he remembered what he loved, that thing that so ravenously ate at him—power, Tuthill supreme over his fellows. Immediately he was consoled.

But during the day, when the land was flooded with light and there was no place to hide and become himself, he saw another face. Constantly it hovered before him, ominous and alarming. The face was mostly eyes; eyes that read him and exposed him with no effort at all, doing what Voss de Lainy had been unable to do. These eyes, unlike the officer's, searched for evil, because they were already formidable with suspicion. De Lainy had searched for good. There lay the distinction. The eyes of Hervey were backed by a file of Tuthill experience. Voss de Lainy had been mostly without that.

For the first time in his Army career, Tuthill had hoped for someone other than Tuthill to be evacuated to the U.S. He had even prayed for the ex-squad leader to be sent home. The squad, hearing Tuthill glowingly speak of Hervey's contribution to the war, had been struck dumb with amazement.

When they recovered, they said that the age of miracles was not yet past—Tuthill was growing thoughtful in his old age. Cailini, the one man who could have penetrated the sudden expansiveness, had listened but had not heard. In his melancholy, the significance had escaped him. Then Tuthill, shrewdly watching Cailini, seeing the absence of suspicion, had expanded to bountifully generous limits.

Outside the tent it was almost dark. The rain began, a sudden furious downpour. Tuthill heard it spattering against the canvas, heard the shouts of the group outside who were holding a bull session, heard their exasperation and profanity, heard them rush for cover. Any minute now he expected Rosinski, but the man did not arrive. Tuthill finally concluded that either he was working overtime on the KP detail, or that he had gone to another tent, probably to talk.

Tuthill was glad of that. He would be alone. He hoped Rosinski would be kept on KP all night, or stay where he was. Men frequently did that. Crowded three or four to a tent, they would talk and talk and talk, and one by one drop quietly to sleep. They rarely woke until early in the morning, around three or four, a taste in their mouths like the urine of a thousand cows. Then they would arise and, sleep-ridden, stumble to their own tents.

Tuthill hoped Rosinski had gone visiting. Then he would be alone—with himself and his heady, moving thoughts.

He surreptitiously peered out of his tent. The whole rain-soaked area was deserted but for one man. Tuthill could not quite distinguish who it was. The man walked a large circle, kicking stones and splashing through puddles. A tall, gaunt GI. It looked like Cailini, but he was not sure. Another man appeared. It was Robins. He went up to the walker, was evidently pleading with him. He attempted to take his arm and lead him to cover, but the walker shook him off. Robins then left him, returned in a few minutes with a poncho. This he draped around the walker's shoulders. Robins disappeared, and though Tuthill waited, he did not come back. Now not a soul was visible but the lone, dispirited, aimless walker.

Carefully Tuthill closed the flap of his tent.

He smiled in the darkness, hugged himself with a secret joy. He began where he always began—at the spot where he had turned to Adams, where, with a bright devouring stare in his eyes, he had said:

"You're frightened, aren't you?"

Robins felt that the whole Pacific Ocean must have flowed under the bridge since he was given command of the first

squad. He was mildly surprised upon looking into a mirror that his brownish hair was not yet streaked with gray.

He had worried himself sick over the squad. He had grown angry and indignant too, but now all of that was gone. Only the worry remained. Cailini's melancholy, Cailini's ceaseless pacing, Cailini's aloneness, had removed the indignation. Now Robins understood why he had sneered. So he had returned and become the Robins of old, the Methodist conscience and the I-wouldn't-ask-them-to-do-what-I-wouldn't-do-myself attitude. Remembering his sullenness, he blushed. And though he still found it difficult to explain Rosinski's action, he had forgiven the man. He had not phrased it in words, but he had made it evident through the tone of his voice, the expression on his face. Although Rosinski had betrayed no indication of having noticed, Robins knew he had seen and understood. Silently he thanked the Adonis for that.

What worried him now was the Adams affair. He did not know what to make of it. He said it seemed so funny that a man should disappear like that. Say what you like, but something, somewhere, wasn't quite right. He could not explain what or why, he just felt it. Of course, Adams was a funny guy. But then, to disappear in the night! It didn't make sense. And he was sure that Tuthill was holding something back. That was another thing he felt. But what could the man hold back? Lord, he couldn't have carried Adams away somewhere. He simply couldn't—not without being seen. And Adams would have put up a squawk. He was no puny kid, small as he was. He, Robins, had watched him too often during the months he'd been with the squad. When aroused, he was a quiet maniac. In his eyes would burn that same smoldering something that had burned in Rosinski's eyes. The kid was hell on legs, was the type that just didn't know when he was licked. He'd fight until he dropped. So Tuthill just couldn't have carried him away. That was, not unless Tuthill had hit him over the head first. And if he'd done that, he would have had to have dragged Adams. And he, Robins, had seen for himself that there had been no tracks left in the mud. Of course, there hadn't been too much mud around the AR nest. But there'd been enough. No, Tuthill couldn't have dragged him. He, Robins, had told Voss de Lainy that, and Voss de Lainy had questioned him thoroughly. Adams must have walked. There was no other way he could have gotten out. And God knows the night, like all these monsoon nights, had been dark enough. Sure, there were flares. But any damn fool could hear them explode and stand still until they burned

themselves out. Hell, the Japs had taught the GIs that lesson.

But why? Why in the name of God should Adams do a thing like that? That's what had worried the lieutenant. For now everybody agreed that he had walked out there. It was the only place you could walk without being discovered.

Tuthill must have been right when he said, "Well, you know Adams. I never saw anybody try so hard to get theirs. Since we came over here he's been trying. Maybe—maybe he got tired of hoping to get his and just went out after it."

Tuthill must have been right. Still, it was a mighty funny business. Say what you like, there was something screwy about it somewhere.

But where?

And why?

And what?

You had to admit it, funny as it looked, Tuthill really did have something when he'd said what he said. He really did. After all, give the devil his due.

Yet, how could Tuthill be mixed up in this? Hell, the lieutenant had questioned him for over two hours. That was when they had first arrived in bivouac. And the lieutenant hadn't been able to pin anything on him. Not that he'd tried to pin anything on him. He'd questioned to try to find out the why of the whole thing. And the lieutenant was nobody's fool. He was one smart boy. If anybody could get to the bottom of this mystery, it was the lieutenant. But even he had given in, had said that, as much as he hated to admit it, Adams must have committed suicide.

Why?

Well, the lieutenant had been inclined to agree with Tuthill. He said, "After all, these were unusual circumstances and Adams was a different kind of a person." All the evidence advanced Tuthill's theory.

After Tuthill had been dismissed, the lieutenant had turned to him.

"What do you make of it, Corporal?"

"I don't know, sir." And he had added after hesitating, "Smells fishy to me."

Waspishly, Voss de Lainy had snapped back, "What's fishy, Corporal?"

Robins had not taken offense. He could plainly see that the lieutenant was about to collapse with fatigue, and only by a tremendous effort did he sit up straight and keep his eyes open.

"I don't know exactly, sir."

"But you must have had reason for saying that?"

"I'm afraid not."

The lieutenant held up his head with his hands. "Just a hunch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Nothing more?"

"No, sir."

Voss de Lainy had thought long on that. Robins began to believe he had gone to sleep with his eyes open, but at last he said, "You're sure now?"

"Sure of what, sir?"

"That it's just a hunch? I mean, you're not holding something back? Not shielding someone?"

"Me, sir? Shielding someone?"

"Yes." He paused, and his tired eyes had bored through him. "Like you shielded Cailini that day?"

Robins started. He stammered, "I did shield Cailini."

"Yes, I'm quite aware you did."

"How—?"

"Never mind."

"Yes, sir."

"And it's just a hunch?"

"That's all, sir."

Robins began to wish he had kept his mouth shut. He wondered if he would ever learn.

"Well," de Lainy had concluded, "we haven't any proof that there might have been foul play, and until we do, Robins, we'd better keep our hunches to ourselves."

Robins stared in amazement. "You, sir? You have a hunch?"

De Lainy closed his eyes. "I don't know, Robins. I'm so tired I don't know what I do have." With an effort he stood up. "There's something about this whole business I don't like, and yet, I guess it could have happened the way Tuthill says." He rubbed his eyes, and, in sudden indignation, said, "Hell, I'll think about it tomorrow. Good night, Robins."

"Good night, sir."

"And if you should notice anything unusual, let me know, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

Walking back to his own tent, he wondered if Voss de Lainy really had a hunch, or whether he had said that to make him feel less like a fool.

He quietly and savagely swore, bitter against himself. Everything within him wanted Hervey back. He hated to wish a man back to this, but—

There was one bright spot on the horizon. Polson had come out of his trance. Thank God for that. The farmer had snapped

to the day the orders for bivouac came through. Somehow, the excitement had penetrated and he was okay now. Oh, sure, he was quieter than he'd ever been, if that were possible, but that damn stare had gone from his eyes and he didn't mention Zoole any more.

But now Cailini was almost as bad. Just walked around and around the area. No matter what you said, he kept walking, or lay in his tent staring at the sky through the flaps.

2

SIX very bedraggled men stood outside the Robins-Lunagan tent. They were replacements. Standing in the roaring, teeming rain, five of them were hesitant about ascertaining the identity of the persons inside the tent. The sixth man possessed none of their awkward rookie embarrassment. He was obviously an old-timer, had even mastered the art of smoking in a torrential rain. The five looked helplessly at the glowing cigarette. It was all they could see; because the night was so black, it seemed to be a thing of substance. But the cigarette offered no aid. Remembering the manner he had briefly looked at them on the way up, they suspected that he was again quietly though deeply amused.

Miserable and forlorn, they moved closer to each other, hoping one of their group would be intrepid enough to face the unknown individual inside the pup tent.

"This is it!" they had silently told themselves, and the awkwardness within them had grown mighty.

Previously they had mingled almost exclusively with other rookies, and a common unity had bonded them. The sure knowledge of the abundant surrounding ignorance had dispersed their personal fears of betraying their newness. Previously the war had been something that lay in the tenuous haze of tomorrow, something comfortingly distant. And while they had lived through that phase, there had always been hope that maybe the war would end before they personally hit combat—or combat hit them. But, alas, tomorrow had moved into today.

This was *it*. And inside this tent was the man who would be their immediate leader. No, more than leader. Ruler supreme. For this was the beginning of what was now their war. No longer were they sure they would see the dawn as they now

saw the black night. No longer were they as wise as the men who surrounded them, no longer strong, assured, confident, inviolate.

They were rookies. And no one could shout that slur more penetratingly than they were shouting it at themselves right now. Here, on all sides, sheltering in this vast forest of pup tents, were men who bore the magic, inestimable, Deity-like label, VETERANS. These men were not greenhorns, these were graduates, already baptized in blood, the thunder of guns, the unparalleled ferocity of assault. These were proven, had already walked through the valley of the shadow and emerged, victorious over the nameless thing.

Yes, these were wise, these knew-the-score. You could not bull these men. You were a rookie, and they knew it, and, try as hard as you might, again and again you were going to slip and show your awful greenness. And, Lord, you might slip once too often. Then never again would you display ignorance.

Indeed, these men knew it all. They were God. And why shouldn't they know it all? They had walked through interlacing lanes of machine-gun crossfire; dodged mortar shells; crept up on the enemy, ripped his throat from ear to ear, felt the sudden sticky warm gush of blood on their hands, smelled its pukey-like odor; savagely—without even thinking of things like *sin* and *conscience* and *Thou shalt not*—kicked men's faces and bodies and genitals in; thrust and parried with inches of horribly lethal bayonet steel flashing before their faces; watched the flooding waves of heavy artillery fire as it combed the land—inexorably rolling closer—until one could count the seconds left remaining to life.

Yes, they knew it all and now were veterans, beyond horror and tragedy, because they had known it all.

And you were rookies. And you didn't know a goddam thing. For hadn't they warned you back in basic training, these same men who had fought and had been returned home to teach, that, "You ain't seen nothing yet, Joe!"? And hadn't they added the ominous threat, "Wait 'til you get over there, Joe!"? They had smiled a knowing smile. "You'll see! Just you wait now! You'll see!" Then these same men had turned to other instructors, and quietly, but not quietly enough, concluded "Poor, goddam bastards!"

The rookies had squirmed, remembering their wives, their children, their folks, but, above all, they remembered themselves. They had looked fretfully at each other as the ugly head of war showed them its devouring head. They had felt fear, like a football player, kick the two balls of their hearts. But they had come out of it, for they, in looking around, had seen

the bright and spacious and serene Georgia sky, had heard someone in the crowd scornfully laugh, whisper, "Hell, no sense in crossing bridges till you get to them." Immediately they had been restored, had said, "Yes, the war's tomorrow, and it's only today."

But now those bridges had been crossed. The other side was the United States of America, a sad seven or eight or nine thousand miles away. Ruefully they knew that home might just as well have been the other side of eternity, the distance to the end of the war, or to an acute sickness, or to a striking injury, and perhaps, if the worst happened, home might become that other side of eternity.

Sure, this was it.

And a few inches away, inside this tent, was the beginning of *it*. So, with the rain pouring down on them, they hesitated, shifting first from one foot to the other, disturbing the squelching, sucking mud, waiting for the other man to make the move, that they might begin *it*.

. What would this Robins be like? A man through the war newly born in brutality? A man who had ceased to care?—indifferent, casual, careless? A man bitter and resentful?—because the war was now several years old and they had wilfully, or by circumstance, delayed so long? A man made understanding?—out of the savagery created kind?

Exactly what?

And who shall be the courageous one? To poke a head through the flaps and inquire if this is the tent! And please let it be the right tent! Let us not have to suffer this again.

Goddam that sixth man! Why can't he make the move? He's a sergeant! Standing there, watching their silhouettes, probably laughing.

O Lord! Were all of them going to be like this? So many birds of prey prepared and waiting to swoop? Calculating, boring eyes! Plumbing their depths, measuring their potentialities, speculating on their endurances, distinguishing their weaknesses? And always quiet and amused and mocking eyes! To be constantly on exhibition! The new and horribly green America versus the old and proven and absolute! What chance had they?

O Lord! O Lord!

One man nudged his neighbor. "Go ahead, Rosenwinkle!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"What's wrong with you? Haven't you got a tongue in your mouth?"

"Sure."

"Then you be me!"

"But you've got the old gift of gab."

"Don't hand me that!"

"Hell, you're a Jew. Jews can talk their way around anything."

Rosenwinkle looked belligerent. "Are you sneering, Koonce?"

"Christ, no."

"It sure sounded like it."

"Take it easy, man!"

"You're the one that wants to take it easy. Any more cracks like that and—"

"And you'll what?"

"Just try one, Koonce, and you'll find out what!"

"Aw!"

"Aw!"

A third man threw up his hands in disgust. "For Christ's sake! Fighting already! Can't wait till you meet the Japs!"

"But he called me a Jew!"

"So what? You are a Jew, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you want him to call you? A Hottentot or something?"

"It was his voice!"

"It's your imagination!"

Koonce said, "Honest, I didn't mean anything."

"Well—" Rosenwinkle was reluctant. "Okay, then."

"Okay."

A silence followed, and they realized, sheepishly, that they were right back at the beginning again.

"Well—?" said the third man, finally.

Eagerly they turned to him. "Well, what?"

"Who's it going to be?"

Another awkward silence.

Jowanowitch, the third man, said, "Can't stand out here all night."

"Yeah."

"I'll say!"

"Ain't it the truth?"

"Son-of-a-bitching weather! We'll be swimming any minute now."

They all looked to the glowing cigarette, waited for the sixth man's remark. But he, awesomely, remained silent.

Rosenwinkle thought: If only he'd say something. Just a little thing. Like a "Yeah," or the expected, "You ain't seen

nothing yet." Then they could speak to him, ask him what to do.

Jowanowitch thought: He's waiting. He's listening to every word that's been said. Now why?

Szymczak thought: Son of a bitch!

Smith thought: I'm hungry. When are we going to eat?

Koonce did not think at all. Impulsively he rapidly turned, lifted the flaps of the pup tent, thrust his head into the interior, and in his excitement, before he could stop himself, had shouted in a stentorian voice:

"Corporal Robins here?"

The quiet game of five hundred rummy was rudely interrupted. Lunagan jumped, almost elevated his buttocks clear of the ground sheet. Polson dropped his cards. Rosinski's hand twitched, automatically ashed his cigarette. Robins' reflex was to shout the first thing that hit his tongue, equally stentorian in volume, "Yes, sir." And the candle was extinguished by the blast.

There was a dead and startled silence.

Outside, Hervey rocked with noiseless laughter.

Koonce was terribly mortified. It was the most embarrassing moment of his life. One word appeared in his mind, swiftly expanded, and soon it was madly shouting its indictment. Jackass!

Polson said, "Good heavens!"

Lunagan stuttered, "What was that?"

Rosinski murmured, "Must be the Profile himself."

Hearing the remarks, Hervey's laughter reinforced itself.

Koonce thought: I've done it now. KP for Koonce for the remainder of his natural.

Robins cautiously asked, "Who is it?" He was determined to discover exactly who the mysterious loud-mouthed son of a bitch was before he gave him hell. After all, it might be an officer.

In a quiet, suddenly timid and extremely respectful voice, Koonce inquired, "Corporal Robins?"

"Yes, I'm Corporal Robins."

A deep breath. "This is Private Koonce reporting."

Hearing the "private," Robins began to get angry. "Reporting for what?"

"Replacement duty, Corporal."

Robins yelled, "Replacement? You a goddam replacement?"

"Me and five others, Corporal."

Rosinski echoed Robins, incredulity ringing in his voice. "Replacement? Jesus rookies?"

Lunagan shouted, "The nerve of those bastards! Barging in here like that! Can you beat that?"

A wave of righteous indignation swept over the tent's occupants.

Goddam rookies muscling in like that and upsetting their game! What in God's name was the Army coming to? Well, these bastards had to be taught a lesson.

They almost knocked the tent over in their eagerness to get at the replacements.

"What gives here?"

"Who in hell do you guys think you are?"

"What's the goddam idea?"

Robins shouted, "Now look here, you guys, we're not taking this guff from anyone, let alone a bunch of greenhorn rookies. And you'd better get this into your thick skulls right now. 'Cause if you don't, there's going to be trouble. Big trouble. And we're just the outfit to dish it out. See?"

The four ex-occupants began to walk among the replacements. Vociferously they stated their demands, made their threats. Robins began vigorously to tap the nearest man on the chest, a tap for each syllable he uttered.

And then it came. The voice shot from the darkness. The four heard it, recognized authority in its tone. Its edge smote them, and they stood suddenly still.

"So you'd strike a superior officer, would you?"

Robins' mouth fell open.

"What is this? Mutiny?" Then it took on a new note. "Line up there." They did not move. Now it lashed, stinging them with its fury. "Goddammit, move when I speak. Line up, I said."

Lunagan moved with the agility of a startled rabbit. "Fellows," he pleaded, whispering his urgency, "line up. Please line up."

They formed a line. Koonce felt like kissing the sergeant. And Hervey could barely utter his commands because of the laughter that shook him. He began to stride before the line.

"Stand up," he screamed. "What are you? Soldiers or schoolgirls?"

Before Lunagan, who was shaking in every limb, he commanded, "Stand up! Didn't you hear me? Stand up, I said!"

Lunagan stood on tiptoes, poised like a ballet dancer.

"Come on!" Hervey shouted. "You can do better than that."

The little man began frantic jumping motions.

"What's the matter? St. Vitus Dance? Or is it that you're about to menstruate?"

Lunagan vigorously nodded his head.

Rosinski, out of the corner of his mouth, growled to Robins, "Who in hell is it?"

Robins whispered back, "Must be the General."

And Lunagan, hearing, jumped higher and higher.

Hervey moved to the next man. It was Robins.

"What's wrong with you? Got a tumor in your belly?"

He began to slap Robins' stomach.

"Come on! Stick it in!"

Robins stuck it in, and automatically the other side shot out quite like a bustle.

Hervey thought he would choke with laughter before the wildly incongruous shadow picture.

Now he slapped Robins' buttocks.

"And stick this in."

The unhappy squad leader stuck it in, and the stomach, once again, flopped forward.

Hervey slapped that, then the rear, then the stomach, once again, flopped forward.

"What are you trying to do?" he asked. "Promote sexual intercourse with the air?"

Then he could suppress his laughter no longer. He opened his mouth and it gushed wildly forward. He held his sides, bent double, rocked backwards and forwards. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Four men looked sheepishly at each other.

Polson muttered, "What is this?"

Robins swore, "Christ!"

Rosinski growled, "Shit!"

And Lunagan jumped up and down.

Hervey, now drunk with laughter, fell against Rosinski. Instinctively, the private put out his hands and caught him. Holding Hervey, he pushed the helmet back, looked closely at the face. He jumped as he recognized him. A whoop sprang from his throat. He forgot his disgust as he pumped the laughing man's hand, as he excitedly shouted, "Hey, fellows! It's Hervey!"

They crowded around him, took his other hand, began to pump that. They slapped him on the back, and Robins, joy surging through him, embraced him.

"You son of a bitch!"

"You bastard, you!"

"Goddam! The old Sarge himself!"

"Bless your guts!"

"Ain't it good to see him!"

"Jesus, so you couldn't stay away?"

"Kicked you out of the hospital on your ass, I bet!"

"Ain't he something? Putting us through that?"
"We should roll you in the mud!"
"Goddam!"
"Christ, but it's good to see you!"
"Yes, indeed, the old Sarge himself!"
"Biggest bastard in the Pacific!"
"Now our troubles'll begin!"
"Vacation's over, fellows!"
"Goddam!"
And more handshaking. And more backslapping.
"Come on inside," said Rosinski. "Let's bat the breeze."
"Yeah, come on."
"No sense in standing in this piss."
"Wait," said Hervey. "What about the replacements?"
"I'll take care of them," said Robins. "You go on in."
"Okay."
"Swell."
They went in, squeezed tight against each other in the tiny space. They relit the candle.
"Now, said Rosinski. "Tell us what happened. Tell us all. But first, Sarge, tell us, did you make the nurse?"

It was all over, but Tuthill continued to lie on his stomach. Languorous contentment bathed him. He relaxed in its sea, a little spent, but now indolently soothed. He had been big again, had exercised himself as conqueror, had drunk the pithy sweetness of his power. He had, deliberately this time, masturbated again. It had not been the swift and combustible act that it had been last time. Inflamed, drunk with the picture of Adams' face, he had forced the orgasm, again through gritted teeth and hard bright eyes.

Power, he thought. It was sweet. It was the only way to live. The only really exciting way.

He rested, his head pillowed in the crook of his naked arm. He sniffed, experimenting, smelled the odor of his sweat. He projected the tip of his tongue from his mouth, barely licked his arm, tasted the flavor of that sweat. It was salty. Tuthill laughed. Sure, he'd say it was salty. Again he projected his tongue, but this time to caress the texture of his skin. There were many hairs on his forearm. He liked that. He felt it was mannish, proof of his power. And he continued to lick his arm. He traveled down, toward his wrist. It began to toughen. Then he bit himself, slowly, lightly at first, to see how he would react. He began to tighten his hold, to see how much he could take. Again he wished Adams were here. He'd like to bite him, until he cried out, and he'd keep on biting until he'd

tasted blood. Pressing against the blanket that was rolled as a pillow, he wondered why Adams had run away. Just when things were getting good! Adams could have had himself a time! And he'd walked over to the Japs! That was stupid. He walked away just when he'd gotten the courage to do the thing he'd always wanted to do.

Tuthill made an impatient gesture. He rolled over on his back, stared with unseeing eyes at the ceiling of canvas. His fingers began to drum a tattoo on the ground sheet. He worked his upper teeth over his lower lip. His left foot pawed the earth.

He wondered what was wrong. He told himself he must be crazy. This was no time to be feeling restless. Now was the moment of strength. Frustrated people got restless, the lambs of the world, the lambs who wanted to be lions. Certainly not the lions themselves. Not the Tuthills.

While he attempted to penetrate his anxiety, he heard a sudden clamor outside the tent, slightly to the left.

He moved, lifted the flap and peered out. The night was like pitch, so he listened to the voices. They were angry and shouting voices. Then a new voice cut through the babel, and there was no other sound but its short and barking commands.

Tuthill twisted his head. He said to himself: There's something familiar about that voice!

Now it was laughing. Golden laughter ringing through the night.

He felt a chill.

As if in answer to his listening, the amazed, delighted voice of Rosinski shot through the blackness, "Hey, fellows! It's Hervey!"

Tuthill sprang wildly back. He cowered in the rear of the tent, his hands and arms held up before his face as if to ward off some expected blow.

He crouched there, a cold sweat blistering his skin.

He moved suddenly dry lips.

"Hervey."

Slowly, listlessly, around and around. Over three hours now. Stones kicked and ever widening puddles sloshed through.

Cailini had walked for so long, the unconscious rhythm of his feet, the therapy of fatigue, his mind created a vacuum by the hypnotic loneliness, he had walked out of the familiar world. What he did, he no longer knew. He had stepped out of his body. No longer with his body, only of it. Awareness of the body as such had gone, yet he was soothed by it. He was no more the servant of the body, he was, for the first time and without knowing, master. Its now quiet passions, its

powers and untapped miracles, bowed the knee before him.

Yet still that body walked, held the soaked and long-forgotten cigarette.

He had shrunk until he was the size of his soul, and this, a compass needle, now insensitive to the magnetic variation and deviation of flesh demands, had slowly swung, automatically and inexorably, to point to the great polar field itself.

So he had followed, piloted, had walked into a place but vaguely familiar, familiar through past vision's emotion and the hope of loneliness, but never before visited. They might as well have been foreign, these untrod labyrinth-paths of the universe within being. But he had arrived there, not even knowing he had left the old city.

Yet still, as in a dream, the body walked, head held down, looking at thighs and knees coming forward, the sudden appearance of large feet. Then it bumped into a tree. Because the walk was slow, the collision was light, and yet the rough bark stung.

The shock moved Cailini, brought the first tenuously coercive thoughts into his mind.

Now the needle, caught again by flesh's pull, began to waver.

Cailini, standing under the tree, listened to the roaring rain, pulled his poncho closer around him, and then sat down.

He felt a spot on the back of his hand begin to itch, and, looking, he saw the beginning of a wart. Idly he picked at it, then saw another two inches away. He turned his hand over, looked at his big square palm, the same calloused hand that had held the Christ. He felt sad, began to wish, and then, suddenly, he started. In the center of the palm was a cluster of tiny, rashlike corns, the beginning of at least twenty warts.

Cailini sat quite still, staring, appalled, and in imagination seeing what his hand would soon look like. After a long minute, he closed his fist, turned and looked away.

Part of his mood, like an aside, said: You'll become a monster. You'll frighten. People will avoid you and walk away. But the large part of him remembered heaven's comedy, and now he knew its title, "The Vendetta of Jesus."

The needle stood rock still, pointing straight and true to the polar field.

Cailini's lips twisted into a crooked line. His head fell back and he saw the leaves on the tree above him. Those shaking leaves were not moved by the wind, but by the heaving laughing bodies of angels—one angel to every leaf—laughing so hard the rain became their urine.

He sat without moving, treasuring this moment, his breasts torn open, though at the same time, contemptuous, defying the

angels to dilute the blood in the holy grail that was his art—art his sense of atonement for being. Then he too laughed, a ringing song of gold, as fresh and joyous as the ghost light of his Chesapeake. He leapt to his feet, hugged and kissed the trunk of the tree, feeling every pore in his body erupting volcanic fire, and the pain that racked him was the immortal chords of Orpheus, rising and swelling high above the ocean of angelic voice.

He was free at last. From the harvest of weakness he had gathered a monstrous strength. No more would he masturbate in Eden, that lost seed the pollen of the warts. Never again would he beat himself to death with a rabbit's paw. Today he would start to spend his fund of the mystical, the thing that is the ultimate in man and in art's impatience, the maturing of imagination—dear Christ—and Him, new weapon, a club of smoke.

Cailini knelt and prayed. "O Master Creator, Artist Supreme, hear an apprentice. Accept my gratitude for the torment You have caused me. Sear me again with Michale's burning sword, until, with fire around my feet, I too shall walk and leave footsteps in the water, until my soul shall be that flame, and, like the sun, shall cast no shadow. Hear me, in the name of Christ and the blessed eternal Vendetta. Hear and answer. Amen."

Hervey asked, "Anybody got any fruit juice?"

Rosinski raised his eyes in glad surprise. "You got alky?"

Hervey nodded. "Sure. I got chummy with a medic and he swiped me a bottle."

He eased it out of the bag he carried, taking great care that the second bottle he possessed remained concealed. That, he told himself, he was saving for a quiet drunk—for Cailini and himself.

Finally he freed it and held it up.

A cheer burst from them.

Robins nudged Rosinski. "Hey, Rosie, you were on KP today. Did you see where they kept the fruit juice?"

"Sure. But it's that sour grapefruit."

"What's wrong with that?"

"You mean, you like it?"

"Hell, it will kill the taste of the alky, won't it? All we want is the kick."

"You want me to go and swipe a can?"

"One can won't be much help."

"If you come with me we can get several."

"What are we waiting for?"

Five minutes later they were back, puffing from their exertions, and into the tent they threw a case of the juice.

They were extravagantly complimented.

"Have any trouble?"

They laughed.

"The nerve of this outfit's CO!"

"What's Mennen done now?"

"He had an armed guard over the food dump."

"No!"

"Yes, he did. Isn't that right, Rosie?"

"Sure is."

Hervey looked at the case and then at them. "What happened to the armed guard?"

"The guy had the nerve to challenge."

"He was going to shoot."

Lunagan said, "Must be one of these rookies. No old-timer would do that."

Hervey said, "An old-timer would show you where the stuff was."

"Must have been a rookie."

"Well, what happened? What did you do to him?"

Robins chortled. He was already drunk. "Sarge, this will slay you."

"What?"

"Well, the end of a long story is that one armed guard is right now sleeping peacefully in a slit trench."

They roared with laughter.

"Bet you he dreams he's a sewer rat."

"With that stink! I'll say!"

"Got to initiate these rookies one way or another."

"Mennen will have a fit."

"I bet you we have a special muster tomorrow."

"And they'll search the tents while we're on parade."

"What'll we do?"

"Drink it. That's what."

"If we drink it all, we'll soon be keeping that armed guard company."

"Well, I'll be damned if I'm going to throw it away."

"What'll we do then?"

Polson said, "That's simple."

They turned to him. "What's simple?"

"Dig a hole and bury the stuff. Every time you need a can, you stick your fingers in and pull one up."

"Say, that's an idea."

"Idea, hell! That's a solution!"

"Ain't he the one though? Never speaks unless he says something."

"Give that man the first drink."

They passed the fruit juice around, split one end of each can with Robins' bayonet, drank a mouthful and then refilled with alky.

They held up the cans, looked at Hervey.

"Here's looking up your old dirt road, Sarge!"

He returned their looks, knowing as well as they of the tight emotion concealed behind that flippant remark. This was their way of welcoming him home, and more, it was their hearts saying how glad, how goddam awful glad, they were to have him home.

"Thanks, fellows." He looked down at the can. "It's good to be back."

And then, incongruously, he thought of Norah. A pain ripped at him. He was glad his head was down, that they could not see his expression. Norah with hair of captured sunlight, with eyes as blue as the China Sea on a cloudless day. Norah, he would never see again.

He wished Cailini and he were together and alone now. He'd like to tell Cailini about Norah.

Because he knew they were looking at the bowed head, he raised his face, forced himself to smile—that old mocking smile, and with a touch of anguishing bathos, said, "And here's looking up your dirty old dirt roads!"

They drank.

A barrage of questions were shot at him, and because he knew they wanted exaggeration, that it was expected of him, he gave it. Every man in the tent joined in, even Polson, but mostly the demands sprang from Robins and Rosinski.

"What do women look like nowadays?"

"Are they still being born with g'knockers?"

"Like this?"

"No! Like that?"

"Some of the bags were charging?"

"You don't say?"

"How much?"

"Well, goddam!"

"Haven't they got any patriotism at all?"

"A few!"

"Praise the Lord for that!"

"Anyway, did you, Sarge?"

"You did?"

"Good for you, Sarge!"

"Trust the old first squad to hand out a good time."
"Say that again!"
"What did she look like, Sarge?"
"You say not *she,* but *they?"*
"You lying bastard son of a bitch!"
"Hang the washing on that line!"
"They cried when you were assigned back to your outfit!"
"What are you trying to hand us?"
"The truth?"
"You ain't never heard the word before!"
"Shut him up somebody before we choke on the stuff!"
"Get the bulldozer!"
"If bullshit were water, Hervey would be the Pacific Ocean himself!"
"Wouldn't he though?"
"Ain't he something now?"
"Look at that straight face!"
"The ham!"

And so it went. They laughed and shouted, determined to get as drunk as was possible on one bottle of multi-shared alky. They roared over the incident of Lunagan's ballet-like jumping up and down. They got hysterical over Robins' attempt to promote sexual intercourse with the air.

The camaraderie was warm and snug. They wrapped themselves in its folds, and so voluminous was it, it even gathered the despised Lunagan into its glowing envelope.

Cailini lay on his stomach in his tent. He held a pencil in one hand, a cigarette in the other, and before him were several sheets of paper.

He wrote, pausing frequently, erasing, then writing again.

He wrote as an artist sketches, swift bold strokes, aware of line, seeing what he had done, what was to come, and seeing what he had not sketched but what still was there. He wrote as an actor acts and a dancer dances, feeling the drama burning every vein, letting this pour into the audience, having fun, fun even in tragedy, tasting the worship the audience sent back, and in turn, worshiping an ineffable affinity that grew bigger and bigger as the swifter running action thickened and expanded—yet never touching the peak, always a little below.

The way he wrote!—himself was without end. Nature pushing up a blade of grass; a pipe line drawing from the sewers of heaven; a shell of war that ate a little girl's legs; a rose in Mary's hair; the heat between two lovers' bellies; fire that licked at a trapped Adonis face; Mercury beguiling Prometheus, and Prometheus sneering back; a black dove; the sigh-

ing blood of the lamb; a jealous mother lying, "You can't marry her, my son, you can't—and why?—because, one day, soon now, you will go mad—as your dad went mad. Oh, son, you can't do this to a good girl. Don't fret, don't weep—your mummy's here, always here, with you, son."

He wrote on, faster now, his pencil spilling words, wild unearthly music that came from the empire of unknown, unguessed self.

Then, at last, he was finished. He picked up the papers, put them in order, relit his dead cigarette, lay back, and by the light of the candle prepared to read them—as dispassionately and critically as he could. He was himself defying Cailini to inspire himself. But as he read, his eyes seeing again the pictures the barbaric imagery conjured up, his ears hearing the sonorous tonal harmony, his body flushed hot as the delight quickened his blood's flow.

Putting down the papers, he looked at the candle, saw in the center of the living flame Blake's tiger eye.

Cailini bowed his head in pride and humility.

Hervey said, "Where's Cailini?"

"I looked for him," Robins replied. "Both Rosie and I looked for him when we went to get the juice."

"You couldn't find him?"

"He wasn't where I'd last seen him."

"Where was that?"

"Up the area a way. Yet, you know, we might have missed him. He could have walked farther up."

Hervey finished his drink. "Think I'll go and see if I can find him."

"You going already, Sarge?"

"I may be back."

"Well, see you tomorrow."

"Sure."

"Good night, Sarge."

"Good night."

Cailini had put his pencil and writings away. He looked at his watch idly, and was surprised at the lateness of the hour. He wondered where Polson could be, Polson who shared the other half of the tent. It was not at all like him to be out all night. Sometimes Polson played cards with Robins and Rosinski, but he had never stayed out this late before. Then Cailini shrugged. Probably he'd fallen asleep in the tent where he played and Robins had not woke him up.

Robins, Cailini had noticed, handled Polson very gently now, inordinately grateful that the man was well again. He gave Polson every consideration and, Cailini was sure, the squad leader would have pulled a KP himself right now rather than have the farmer do it.

Impulsively Cailini reached for his poncho. Draping it around him, he left the tent and walked out into the stinging rain. He was not at all sure what he was going to do first. It was one of two things: either to reassure himself over Polson, or to bum a drink from that bunch of noisy bastards over the way.

As he approached, Cailini saw a man leave the tent where all the noise seemed to have been. It was the Robins-Lunagan tent. He couldn't understand that.

"Hey, Joe," he said to the man. "What's going on? Somebody throwing a party?"

Hervey said, "Hello, Bob."

Cailini thought he had been stabbed. With a tremendous effort he swallowed the emotion that rose in his throat.

He stood quite still, waiting for it to pass. Then he said, "Hello, Bill."

Hervey put out his hand, rested it lightly on Cailini's shoulder.

"What do you know?"

"Know? Nothing much."

They began to walk toward Cailini's tent.

Cailini said, "Glad to have you back, Bill."

And Hervey replied, "Me too, Bob."

3

SOME of the alcohol had been drunk. Cailini was glad it was one of those nights when getting drunk came hard. He liked too well the quiet solemnity he and Hervey shared.

"How have things been?" Hervey asked quietly.

"Bad."

"I'm sorry."

"Robins had a tough time."

"He seemed happy enough tonight."

"He's glad you're back."

Hervey did not reply.

"He did a good job though. Damn good, considering. And none of us helped him any." He paused before continuing, his voice still low. "Those last days were plenty bad."

"How do you mean, Bob? In what way were they bad?" Then, a sudden alarm in his voice, "I didn't see Tuthill. No. And Zoole and Adams." He looked at Cailini. "They didn't all—?"

"No. Not quite, that is. Tuthill is around somewhere. But Zoole and Adams are gone."

Hervey winced.

"Zoole was dead before you left."

"How?"

"Jap infiltrationist. Probably the same one that you got."

"I'm glad."

Another silence.

"And Adams—?"

Cailini looked at his friend. "Bill?"

"What?"

"Don't let's talk about it. Not tonight. Do you mind?"

Hervey returned the look, his eyes searching Cailini's eyes. Finally he said, "Okay."

"Thanks."

They fell silent, staring at the candle, watching it flicker, the wraiths of smoke that upward wound their tenuous, quivering paths.

Cailini said, "I'm glad it's raining."

"Why?"

"It makes it cold. That way we can keep the tent flaps closed without suffocating. And with the tent flaps closed, we can keep the candle lighted."

"But you'll have the moths and bugs in here. They always get in."

"Not the way this tent is soaked with repellent."

"So that's what stinks. I thought it was your feet."

Cailini smiled.

Hervey indicated Cailini's drink. "I see you've learned how to nurse it."

"Sure have."

And now Cailini smiled, drawing back his lips in the same sardonic way Hervey did. Cailini wondered if Hervey would ever guess the full extent of what he had gone through in order to learn how to nurse a drink.

They lay at peace, talking, keeping their remarks casual,

light, happy. Outside the rain continued to pour, its heavy spots striking the tent furiously.

Hervey said, "I'm glad we're camped on a hill."

"Me too. Or we'd be floating."

He looked up. "The tent's holding pretty well. I see only one leak."

"Double thickness."

"Yeah?" Hervey grinned admiration. "Moonlight requisition?"

"No, the extra halves weren't swiped. Not technically, that is."

"How—?"

"Polson shares this tent. He brought Zoole's half. And I got yours. Rescued it from the mud."

"That's what I call expediency of the first order."

"Too bad we didn't think about it on New Guinea."

"Why didn't we?"

"And saved ourselves God knows how many soakings."

"Well, you know, there weren't so many spare halves around then."

"That's true."

And again the communion of silence. Again the mighty roar of the rain.

Hervey, his voice suddenly touched with excitement, said, "Bob."

Instantly Cailini felt the new mood. Looking, he saw Hervey's lips held ready to speak, the part smile and part grimace and part sadness that was their expression. But above all, from Hervey's eyes there sprang that same tiger enthusiasm that Cailini had seen in the candle. Now Cailini knew, Hervey also had changed. Interest lit his own eyes. He patiently waited, instinctively feeling the tremble of excitement that ran over the the curtains before they parted to reveal the next act.

Hervey said, "I met a woman."

"Go on."

"Her name," Hervey slowly continued, "was Norah. Norah Calhoon. She was a technician in the WACs. A sergeant." He looked away from the candle and turned to Cailini. "You know something?"

"What should I know?"

"I'm in love."

4

AS soon as the mail clerk arrived, Voss de Lainy dismissed the orientation muster. Ordinarily the men were not interested in the European war, the political situation back home, what Churchill had said to Roosevelt; and when letters were awaiting distribution, ill-concealed boredom became unbridled impatience.

Besides, de Lainy could not wait to rush over to the Command Post, search the officers' stack of correspondence, extract the letter from March, memorize the succinct note, build with imagination, hope—always hope—that this time her careless "I love you" carried some measure of conviction. He could stop torturing himself then, could remove the doubt that he was one of a crowd that March, in her patriotism, wrote to. He was sick of hope and tired of her dispassionate passion.

He wondered why he continued to bother with her.

Perhaps, he thought, it was because she had been kind. Then, bitterly, her type of breed often were. It was part of the camouflage. Kindness was an easy quality when the heart was not involved.

He had dismissed the platoon, with the reservation that they stay within the area allotted for the muster until the hour was completed. He knew a few would take off, if they had not already done so, but the majority would remain. Then he shrugged. Who the hell cared? Just so long as they *looked* like a full platoon.

In a stampede the platoon bore down upon the clerk, shouting and pushing and scrambling.

It was Hervey who quieted the noise and restored order.

"Goddammit, pipe down," he shouted.

A few, safe in the crowd, went on shouting.

"Let's go!"

"What are ya waitin' for? Christmas?"

Hervey looked squarely at the offenders. "One more crack and you can start digging slit trenches with your mess-kit spoon."

No one answered. The babel quieted to whispers. It would never be less.

Hervey turned to the clerk. "Go ahead."

The clerk reeled off the names, sometimes, seemingly, he tied his tongue in a knot and spat in order to get the pronuncia-

tions. As the glad replies of "Here!" met each call, the clerk flicked the letters in the general direction of the sound. Often they fell to the ground, becoming coated at once by the juicy mud. A wail of protest was voiced.

"Better hand them back," Hervey commanded.

The procedure changed, the envelopes were eagerly grabbed, read by each handler—to whom, from whom—and always the static of wisecracking circulated.

As the pile diminished, the faces of those without mail creased deeper in bewilderment and anxiety. Many with mail commenced to read, asking the unfortunates to warn them if their names were shouted again. Unless it were a buddy, a look of venom replied, but they still listened.

Mail call over, they returned to their seats, on ground sheets, on cans, on hunks of wood.

"Are you sure that's all?" the letterless asked.

"Yep, that's it."

An ungovernable fury struck at them.

"Son of a bitch! Why can't those bastards write?"

"Five minutes! That's all it takes! Five shitting little minutes!"

They turned to each other, pleading sympathy.

"Christ! Ain't it the least they can do?"

Now bitter against those they loved, "Ain't it a laugh? All that crap about our heroes fightin' the war, and they can't even take a couple of minutes out to write a letter!"

"Makes you sick, don't it, Joe? Makes you feel they ain't worth fightin' for?"

"Say that again!"

"I don't understand it. I just don't."

"Maybe the Army Post Office snafued again!"

"I'll kill her when I get back. That's what I'll do. I'll knock her up, laugh in her face, walk out."

Then came the wise and smug remarks, from the men who had received. "You should bitch, Joe—the way you fooled around with the Flips!"

"Go to hell!"

"I can't. I'm there right now."

And some, with mail, wished they had been lucky and not received. Invariably, according to the best sentimental Hollywood tradition, somebody was a new father.

"I've got a kid!"

A roar of laughter.

In a fairy voice, some joker would shout, "Oh say! You gorgeous beast! Which of us is the lucky man?"

A crimson blush. "Okay, okay. So it's my wife who had the kid!"

The joker would shout, "Silly boy! You've been over here a year now."

There would be a startled pause, a frenzied counting of the intermediate months on the fingers, a vehement denial.

Sometimes, not often, but sometimes, a terribly quiet, "That's right," would be the reply. Then the joker would feel miserable. Some would laugh, some would wisecrack, but mostly it would be a sympathetic and embarrassed group who attempted consolation.

Both Hervey and Voss de Lainy watched for such incidents. Then they would talk to the man, see that he was kept under observation until he overcame his hurt, until he regained the Army habit of indifference—hardness that was insensitive to domestic upheaval.

They both remembered a New Guinea episode. It had proved to be one of the failures in their attempt to maintain a sort of parental control over the men under them.

They were big boys now, most of them were killers even, but they still—as Hervey once said to de Lainy—had to be mothered.

On New Guinea, Maxie Dubois had received a "Dear John" from his wife. *Maxie,* ran the text, *I've met a guy. I want a divorce.*

Everyone in the platoon got to know about it. Because Maxie was not a faithful husband and had whored in all the principal towns and hamlets the campaign had swept through, no one gave Maxie's reaction a second thought. Many quoted him against himself. They said it was the harvest of long-sown wild oats.

Hervey had spoken to de Lainy, but their thoughts, unlike the platoon's, were not concerned with justice. Maxie's future soldiering, his reasonable contentedness, were what mattered to them.

Hervey and de Lainy had failed because they had agreed Dubois could take it, and that his wife was not the prime requisite in his life.

Women, by Dubois' philosophy, were made for one purpose.

So they had relaxed. But they forgot the French-Canadian's vanity. Less than an hour after their talk about him, Maxie had walked into the jungle. He was carried back, feet first, shot by his own hand, and his own carbine.

The platoon was shocked with astonishment, but Hervey and de Lainy raged insanely. They mustered the platoon and told them that no GI held the prerogative of suicide, not unless

it were in combat, and only then if it were to save other lives or to consolidate a position.

Dubois had been a good soldier. And he had expended his life, wastefully. There were few mortal sins in an Army at war, but that was one of them.

A clan had grouped itself around de Lainy, the one group he despised. They were "the Kissers." Conversation with an officer gave them a sense of prestige. Nothing delighted them more than an opportunity to quote de Lainy. And nothing enraged him more. Upon the slightest provocation they toadied information, of the intimacies of platoon life. Some officers had found these men indispensable, had encouraged them. De Lainy, much to his chagrin, had been compelled to admit that the squealing brought to light the deficiencies of many GIs. All men were intimidated by the knowledge of near combat, and many resorted to tricks to escape. Some officers had saved their lives by having been informed of planned assassination. De Lainy listened to it, not because he was afraid for his life, but because with men at war, when emotions were uninhibited, it was possible to mortally offend a man and not know it.

It was amazing, de Lainy thought, what intrigue and tragedy and humor arose.

On New Guinea, shortly before he had been assigned to the company, Headquarters had ordered an attack on a hill. Suicide, the men said. Attack, HQ repeated. Two commanders, dead. Hervey and Adams the murderers. Finally HQ had caught the determination of the men's mood. The Air Force was sent in, the hill bombed, and only then did they assault.

Many GIs shot or bayoneted prisoners of war. No man was without sin. There were incidents that would horrify the people back home. Here they were commonplace, part of the continuity of war. Practically every man knew of the infractions, and so did the officers, but unless an incident boiled up to incite a mass indignation, nothing was done to punish the offenders. Justice was left to the mills of God.

De Lainy looked impatiently at his watch. Another twenty minutes remained.

Listening to the group that sat close to him, he heard Tuthill (a newcomer to the Kissers) bragging because he had escaped a marriage. Apparently he had been compelled to enlist in order to dodge what probably would have been a shotgun wedding. Now, this morning, a letter from a friend who remained in the U.S. mentioned that the child, a son, had recently passed its second birthday.

Tuthill laughed loudly, and the clique followed. He could

not have been more proud of his accomplishment—not of the child, but the fact that he (and she, too, it seemed) remained single.

It was a conquest. Tuthill harped upon the deed, milked it dry of prestige.

Obliquely de Lainy watched him. The mysterious Adams incident continued to rankle in his mind. Tuthill was talking too loudly, and, although he faced the clique, de Lainy knew that it was he who was being addressed.

Tuthill talked on, always of women. In his voice there vibrated the barest emphasis each time he mentioned a female name.

De Lainy looked at him with sudden new interest. And now, staring hard, he saw the man's desperation.

A *Jane* here. A *Doll* there. This *Tomato*. That *Dish*. A *Broad* who worked in the Treasury Department. A *Dame* from the Bureau of Engraving. *Madeline* who had an apartment in Bethesda. *Lola* who was a secretary. *Pamela* from the Embassy. *Mary* who lived on Girard—the same block as he.

Tuthill smirked as he reeled off the names.

Looking at him, de Lainy felt the man was lying a little, but not much.

Tuthill had been quite a killer. And then de Lainy saw what he had not noticed before.

Tuthill was tall. His frame was well filled, muscled. His face was—? What was the word? Yes! Cute. Sort of naive, cherubic, innocent. An eager face. Filled with, and expressing, the wonder of all things. A sort of male ingénue. It was stamped after the pattern of movie stars, the type that catered to the bobby-soxers.

Tuthill talked on.

Fascinated, de Lainy listened.

Anna. Betty. Esther. Bernice. Ethel.

Tuthill knew de Lainy was watching, and hurried to include them all. He was smirking more often now, defying him, confident.

And the haunting thing in de Lainy's mind grew. He attempted to assist it, now methodically backtracking on his thoughts.

The Adams episode had happened. As soon as they arrived at bivouac, he had questioned Tuthill. The man had answered all his questions, without hesitation, and with apparent candor. He had listened to the answers, and had discovered nothing that even remotely hinted at foul play. But then he had been deadly tired, he might have missed a point, an inflection, a gesture. After the questioning, Tuthill had been dismissed.

Robins had "smelled something fishy," but had offered nothing to back up his hunch. Nothing further had developed since.

Tuthill had been cleared, and Tuthill knew it, so why this sudden, desperate further endeavor to prove something? Prove what? His innocence? Nobody had accused him of being involved in Adams' disappearance—the disappearance that was an obvious suicide, or an attempt at suicide.

Then what? And why?

The only person questioning Tuthill's innocence was Tuthill.

The guilt proved that; this sly subversive something that was the best example of a guilt complex he had ever seen.

Wait a minute!

Guilt conflict!

That rang a bell.

Wait now. Wait.

Then it hit him, like a bomb detonated within his mind. He spun on his heel, turned his back to the group.

Guilt conflict! That had done it. That had brought the answer rushing up.

Tuthill was a Don Juan. Woman after woman. The list was endless. From one conquest he had leapt to another. Out of the whole vast group, not one woman had satisfied him long enough to bring permanence to their union.

And here it came!

If a woman couldn't satisfy him, then who could?

There were only two sexes.

De Lainy stood quite still, until at last it seemed that Adams himself walked by—as he had done ten thousand times—shyly, giving a timid nod, and de Lainy felt again his old feeling, "Such a nice kid!" He had always wanted to say to him, "Don't you fret now, old son. After the war we'll get you a damn good psyc, and if he can't cure you, we'll fix it so you adjust to miss all this hurt.

De Lainy remembered all the nights Adams had entertained the company, even the battalion. He remembered the hundred times Adams had volunteered for patrols, the occasions the kid had leapt from behind some protective cover and dragged injured men back to safety. De Lainy made a movement of anger and despair. What a shame! what a waste! what a pity! The lieutenant fought for control, fought not to run to where Tuthill sat and kick his face and nuts in. He knew now it was not Adams who had been the cocksucker.

What to do about Tuthill was the big question now. A hundred ideas of justice passed through de Lainy's mind. Have the man sent down the line? Report him? Have a court-martial?

He picked these ideas over, selecting, but none seemed quite revengefully harsh enough. Then, abruptly, he wondered. What was he pursuing—justice or revenge?

He noticed Tuthill was not talking any more. De Lainy set his face into lines as near to nonchalance as he could and slowly turned and faced the group.

Only Tuthill was silent. He was straining to keep his stare fixed on a picked spot of earth, and de Lainy knew that Tuthill was seeing his, the officer's, face.

All the gunner's magnificence had deserted him. No more was he the supreme, no more the irresistible. He was what he was, a man steeped in himself, having done what he had done —now on trial before a being who dealt in cold abstracts of what could and what could not be done. The once furious and native passion stood defenseless against the mystery of ordered social conscience.

Tuthill knew he was lost; and he was afraid.

A wave of pity struck de Lainy.

He knew now, Tuthill could not have stopped himself. Like Adams, the act had been necessity, the adding of necessity, each day themselves becoming more and more themselves.

What to do about Tuthill? asked de Lainy. Then he shrugged. In war (leastways this war was honest enough to admit it), it happened all the time. And nobody gave a good goddam, unless it was some of the stupid people who had stayed at home. De Lainy said: So what? So what if the whole outfit was some renaissance of Sparta and the battalion of lovers? Who cared? Who really cared? Who even cared if they all had little Pekingese dogs they were attached to? (and again, here it came) just so long as they didn't slaughter the animals when they got through.

And who was the slaughterer? Tuthill? No, not Tuthill. He was only a victim. So again the murderer was named, that charnel house for souls. In Adams' case a small Michigan town, a population who would never know, or bother to find out, that it was the degenerate and the killer.

De Lainy pocketed his hands to hide their trembling. His heart burned with anger. Fuck them. Wasn't it enough they were having their war won? Was there no limit to the pain and the loneliness and the sacrifice? And for what the Gethsemane?—so that the ostriches might continue to inhabit the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, where graft was king and a nation's profundity was the philosophy of the comic strips?

No, there was nothing that could be done about Tuthill. It was monstrous about Adams—sad that being born to defy, he

had not possessed the courage or obnoxiousness that must run with defiance. And tragedy enough followed Tuthill. One day it would catch up with him, and then, when he discovered himself—God have mercy upon him!

However, he would watch the man. The brute within Tuthill had to be intimidated, he must be taught who was boss. Then de Lainy remembered that Hervey was back. He sighed with relief.

Hervey said to Cailini, "Any of those cigars left?"

"Nearly all of them. Neither you nor I smoke the damn things. And you never did pass them around."

"Let's give them to Robins."

"Why Robins? Why not give everybody one?"

"Didn't you hear? Martha had a son."

"She did?"

"Sure."

"Well, by all means, give him the cigars."

They called Robins into the tent.

"They're somewhat smashed," Hervey apologized, "but if you can use them—!"

His face lit with pleasure.

"What are you going to call the kid?"

"Joseph Larrimore."

"Isn't that your name?"

Robins bowed his head in embarrassment, but it was obvious he was terribly pleased over Martha's gesture.

Watching him as he passed out the cigars, his completely childlike delight, Cailini said, "You'd think we'd given him the state of Texas, wouldn't you?"

"There's nothing wrong with Robins. He wouldn't take the state of Texas for that kid."

Robins listened to the wisecracks and laughed. Nothing could sadden him today. He told himself it really was his day. Hervey had come back last night, and now he was a father. His Martha was with her folks and doing fine. Yes, indeed, everything in the garden was lovely.

Now, if only the damn war would end.

Hervey shouted, "Where the devil are those replacements?"

Abruptly they stopped what they were doing and with frantic haste hurried to where he stood, a few paces in front of his tent.

The old squad grinned at their speed. It was always amusing to watch replacements. Buddy nudged buddy and said, "Give

'em a week and then see the change. They won't be such damned little eager beavers when they hit combat."

Hervey grinned with the old-timers, but to camouflage it before the replacements, said, "Thought you'd gone over the hill already."

They laughed at that, felt somewhat encouraged, lost a little of their stiffness and anxiety, were grateful for his friendliness.

"As you know, I'm Hervey, your squad leader. From here on in, you're my trouble." Glancing at them, he grinned again. "You look like plenty of trouble."

They returned his grin, now not waiting for another member of their group to lead them.

He moved back. He wanted to see every face, and the grin disappeared.

"You know why you're here," he told them, adding, "don't you?"

A couple nodded.

"You're replacements. Replacing dead or injured men."

Only one man winced. It was Smith, already known as the Hungry One.

Hervey winced also. He thought: Hell, not another Lunagan!

To Cailini, he said, "Give me a piece of paper and a pencil."

The only paper Cailini could find was his writer's notebook. That was the last thing he wanted Hervey to read. Surreptitiously he began to tear out a clean sheet.

Hervey said, "Don't tear it out. I'll need the pad to write on."

Torn between the alternatives to refuse or obey, he stood in an anxiety of indecision. Apparently casual, Hervey reached out and took the book from him. Cailini prayed that he would open it at an unused page. Watching Hervey, he saw the mockery return to his eyes, and he knew his prayer was unanswered.

Hervey turned to another page.

"What's your name?" he asked the first man.

"Rosenwinkle, Sergeant."

"First name?"

"Edgar."

"Have you got a second name?"

"No."

To the second man, "And yours?"

"Jowanowitch. John Edward."

Rosinski, who had been visiting the second squad and was a little drunk, shouted, "Rhymes with son of a bitch!"

Hervey turned, said, "And yours rhymes with VD."

Rosinski looked startled, then suddenly laughed. "Why, goddam! So it does at that."

Jowanowitch looked gratefully at the sergeant, but like Voss de Lainy, Hervey played dumb, pretending not to see. He was quite aware in that moment he had won an ally. He had seen the sudden resentment that had welled in the man's eyes, and had made his crack. But he knew that Jowanowitch had a big lesson to learn, or his Army life was destined to be an unhappy one.

The third man said, "Koonce, Sergeant. Peter."

"Middle name?"

He began to stutter. "Will—will—will—"

"Will what? Or is Will your name?"

"No, Sergeant. I—" Then it came with a rush. "I was going to say—would the initial do?"

"No."

Koonce sighed.

"What's the matter? Funny name?"

He nodded.

Cailini felt his heart go out to Koonce. He acutely remembered the hilarity his Roberto Federigo Giuseppe had caused.

The whole squad paused, waiting with their mouths held ready to laugh.

"It's Moonlit."

The squad tittered.

"How come they give you a name like that?"

"Well, my father always said that if it hadn't been for a damn moonlit night, I wouldn't be here."

A roar sprang from the squad.

Hervey said, "You're joking?"

The man breathed tragically. "I wish I was. Oh, how I wish I was."

Koonce did not know it, but in that moment he had cemented himself with the squad. Without reservation, the fraternity had shot out and encompassed him. They were proud to own a man who could boast such a name. It would be the squad brag. They would defy the company, the battalion, to produce a name superior to Moonlit. And he would never be known by anything else.

The fourth man said, "Szymczak, Sergeant." Lamely, he added, "Spelt, *S-Z-Y-M-C-Z-A-K*."

"That's a ouija-board name if I ever heard one."

Rosinski shouted, "Sounds like the Yiddish alphabet to me!"

"Why don't you get a name like that changed?"

"My father did."

"Then how come—?"

"He used to be named Szeming Richard Szymczak. He had it changed to Szeming Szymczak."

Again the squad roared, delighted with the unexpected play.

Hervey scratched his head. "You'll be Ouija from here on. Damned if I can go through that rigmarole each time I want you."

"Suits me fine."

The fifth man said, "Smith, John. No middle name."

Rosinski yelled, "Christ! A bloody foreigner! Throw him out!"

There was no letter from March. De Lainy looked through the stack many times, and still there was no letter.

He could not understand this. The present mail was over a month's accumulation. Usually she wrote each week.

All at once he felt despondent and began slowly to walk toward his tent. Once there, he lay on his bed, turned and faced the canvas wall. He looked at the olive-drab, felt it was a reflection of the gloom inside him. He thought, if loneliness were color, that's what it would be, Army olive-drab. A heaviness lay on him, as if, all at once, the humid air had turned into mud—and that mud substituting for the once warm and vital blood in his veins. Suddenly he made a savage movement, hit the bed with his clenched fist, told himself to stop acting like a child—she wasn't worth it. His father, his mother, his brother and all the family had been right. His father had said, "You haven't got her kind of money." His mother, "She's an upper-class whore." His brother, "You're behaving like a jackass. Listen to me, Jeff, you can do so much better."

Slowly he turned his head and looked at the picture beside his bed. His heart began to beat faster, and the mud in his veins again became blood. He took the picture in his hands as he had done ten thousand times before, and he remembered something Hervey had once said, "Like your body is ice, and that ice on fire."

Hervey looked directly at the replacements, his gaze traveling around the half-circle, from face to face.

"Pretty soon now we'll be going back up front. It's no use your pretending that does not faze you, because it does. Same as it fazes all of us. We all get scared. Plenty. It's no damn fun to have tons of bursting lead thrown your way. Like us, you'll think at first it's all coming at you personally. That the damn Jap wants you and nobody else. It's even worse when you have to assault into the stuff. You'll think you're entering hell. And I guess that's what it boils down to. You'll be so

damned scared you'll probably shit your pants. Well, that's been done before, and so far it hasn't hurt anybody. Outside of being stinky and a hell of a mess, it's nothing to get excited about. And it's no disgrace. Better men than you have done it. Maybe you'll puke. So what? Pants and blouses can always be washed afterwards. If it isn't convenient to wash them, get another pair. And if there's no QM around to issue them, take a pair off the first dead man you meet. He doesn't need them any more. But what I'm getting at is this: shit or puke—it makes no difference—for when we're assaulting we keep right on assaulting. Anyone withdrawing, or by any means escaping from the assault, endangers the lives of the remainder of the squad. In assault every man is needed. Each man means more power, more violence, more assaulting impact—and consequently, more chance of success with a fewer number of casualties. We function as a team. Remember that. And while we're on the subject of teamwork—none of that goddam hero stuff. Nobody is going to win the war on his own. Don't try. Sure, I know, sometimes hero work is necessary, but not often. And if that occasion should arise, we'll all take a hand in it. You know, there's an old GI saying. Maybe you've heard it before, but here it is again." He pointed significantly to the ground. 'Here-o, here-o, lies the hero.'

"Now—always obey orders. You often won't want to, but you've got to. One consolation here in combat is that orders are reduced to a minimum. This isn't basic training where they order you around for the love of seeing you jump. An order here means a definite purpose has to be executed.

"There are some good officers in this outfit, and a couple of bastards. You'll find out who. But don't worry about them. You'll rarely contact them. This platoon's officer is the best. We're lucky in that respect. He won't ever tell you to assault; he'll lead you into it. That's what I meant when I said obey orders. Follow. You aren't on your own. You're part of a squad, and that's part of a platoon, which, in turn, is part of a company, and so on up. Now don't get me wrong. I don't mean we'll advance in any fool banzai charges. None of that suicide stuff. We try to take it easy. Assault, then cover, then assault again. Use your head. That's what it's on your shoulders for. If you think you should crawl, then crawl. If you think you can get up and run forward, then do it. At first, keep your eyes on the old-timers. Do what they do. But mostly you'll crawl. On your thighs and your belly and your chest. And when you do, remember to keep your fanny low. This is important. Especially on flat terrain. In fact, it's the only way you can get close to the Jap and still be in one piece when you

get there. So keep your fanny low. So low an ant alongside of you will look like a mountain. So low your little peckers will plow furrows. But when you get close to the Jap, let's see you get up and get in there. Use everything you've got. Rifle, machine gun, grenades, boots, knife, anything. You kick the Jap in his balls. You rip out his guts. Anything that hurts and puts him out of the fight—but good. Just never give a Jap an even break. He'll never give you one. Kill, and kill goddam fast, or be killed."

Gesticulating with his hands, he warned, "Forget all that movie and magazine shit you've seen and read about Our Brave American Boys. You aren't boys any more. You're men. At least, once through combat and you will be. So you're expected to act like men, to think like men. Your high-school days are over. No more catering to yourself. That was a luxury, but now it's out.

"If you don't like me, if I say something that gets you mad or hurts you, be man enough to come and tell me. That way we can talk it out. Then nobody will go around sulking. We've done this in the past and it's proven pretty effective. Ask any of the old-timers."

A smile barely moved his lips. "Only once did we fail, and I tell you five now, I can't do a goddam thing about altering the shape of my face."

They returned his grin.

"If you get news from home that disturbs you, go and see the platoon leader, Lieutenant Voss de Lainy, or come and see me. Maybe we can help you. Maybe not. But don't let those whining civilians get you down. God knows they'll try hard enough. And if your wife or girl sends you a Dear John letter saying some defense worker is making her happy, so what? The two-timing bitch wasn't worth having in the first place. You're well rid of her.

"I tell you now, the lieutenant is a damn nice guy. He's regular. He won't hand you any chicken. If you prove yourselves—and you can, as the old-timers have already done—you won't have any trouble with him. He'll respect you. And, by Jesus," he said, his voice suddenly formidable, "you'd better return respect for respect. If I catch any one of you abusing his decency, so help me, I'll kick that man in his ass but good and fast and hard."

He stepped back, slowly and thoughtfully surveyed them.

"Well," he said finally, "I can't think of anything else. You've about had it." He concluded, now smiling, "Just don't forget to keep those fannies low." Before their somewhat troubled gaze and serious eyes, he said, "Don't worry. You'll come

out okay. And if you don't—" his smile evaporated and his eyes saddened, "—it can't be too bad. You won't go alone."

Before dismissing them, he asked, "Any questions?"

All but Koonce shook their heads. Tight-lipped and with an apologetic laugh, he said, "Don't know enough to ask any questions."

5

SWIFTLY the days of bivouac passed. They knew that soon a return to the front would be ordered. It would come any day now.

The attendances at Mass or Communion grew larger. Prayers took on a combat fervency. Letters home were eloquent with nostalgia. Old profanities were resurrected, always blaspheming their government who could not see fit to end the war, to end it right now, before the order to return up front was issued. They raved at the Imperial Japanese, ignorant stubborn bastards who didn't know when they were whipped. There were odd silences in the talk as the recent deaths were sharply remembered. Again the eternal question gnawed: Who would be next?

Immediately they were restless, their feet pawing the ground, their fingers scratching suddenly itchy skin, never meeting another man's eyes. They felt they were drowning in their own deep sea of unshed tears. And always there was not enough air to fill their lungs.

Remorselessly the days of rest piled up.

Soon—so soon now.

The supreme fatigue that came after days of fighting had gone. They were fresh again, alive, attuned, and it would be days before they could sink back into the bog of exhaustion and not care about the constant pricking awareness of what might happen.

But it was today, and they were awake, vigorously alive. Yesterday's walk through the valley of the shadow had taught them all about life, how they should have lived it when they were with the opportunity. Now they were afraid there would be no second chance.

Hervey threw the writing pad and pencil into the corner, saying to Cailini as he did so, "It's no good. I just can't write letters any more."

"Not even to Norah?"

"Least of all to Norah."

"What's the matter? Your stomach making like Hamlet again?"

Hervey grinned. "Prometheus would be nearer the mark."

"That eagle been picking on you?"

"It sure feels like it."

"I've got the same pain myself. Like there's a rat in my rib-cage, trapped there, but slowly eating its way out."

"I'll be glad when those orders come through. This waiting is driving me crazy." Hervey moved restlessly. His fingers began to drum a tattoo on his thigh. Suddenly, his voice thick with melancholy, he said, "What a cheap dirty world this is."

Cailini looked at him, saw the tight hard agony in his eyes. As always when Hervey's face was stricken, it became a mirror that reflected like hurt upon Cailini. "Don't," he pleaded, "— don't look like that. I can't bear to see it."

"I know you can't. And I know you'd mount the cross singing if it would help."

Cailini put out his hand. "What is it, Bill?"

"A whole slew of things."

"Norah?"

"Yes."

"Adams?"

"Yes."

"And the war? Going back up front?"

"They're part of it."

"What else?"

"The uselessness of it all. Why live, why bother to live at all? Life isn't even worth the effort you have to make to breathe. Look around you. All this dying, all this mutilation, all this buddy giving his life for buddy—for what? To keep America free for prejudice? So that men like my father can play dirty politics?—as they're doing now. You don't know my old man. He's got an election coming up soon, and if I get killed in this next combat tour, he'll use me to help him win."

"It is a cheap dirty world."

"A world of charnel houses for six million Jews. A world where the supreme prayer is to remain sane for one more hour. We're all lined up in minority groups—everybody's a whipping boy for somebody else. Even machines seem neurotic. We're all slaves—to an assembly line, a ledger, a typewriter, a bank balance, a machine gun, slaves to mobility—got to get someplace!—what the hell place? Art and religion are the people's cosmetics. Just look at religion!—bishops blessing tanks, His

garment made from Stars and Stripes material, the working girl's best friend is the six-o'clock Mass." Hervey made a tired savage movement. "A cheap dirty world. No peasants in America, only masses. Industry—neo-cannibalism. A sense of beauty is the talent they bury in the earth. Babbitts and Little Caesars, Lobbyists and Worshippers of the Dollar, blood is piss, spirits are castrated. I ask you: Is this what we're fighting for?—is this why buddy gives his life for buddy?" He buried his face in his arms. "O God, what a whore you've become. You didn't kid when you said you'd made man in your own image!" He raised his stricken eyes, "Bob, Bob—it isn't this—isn't all this that makes my heart feel like some dried-up prune—not what man is, but what man *could* be." Again he buried his face in his arms.

Cailini began to massage the spot at the back of Hervey's head where the pain always hurt the most. He could hardly answer, for he was sure now the next combat tour was going to be the last chapter in his brother's autobiography of war. And Senator Hervey would win the election.

"Buddy—I won't insult you again by saying stop making like Him. Because I know you always will. But I wish you'd get His sense of humor. Stop being *with* the tragedy all the time. Know your limitations. That your name isn't Prometheus or Orpheus or Jesus—yet. Then, when the squad, dying, say, 'Look at me, Sarge? Just like you, eh, Sarge?' laugh—and laugh and laugh. Don't you think Jesus had to smile when the people called Him Our Lord and Saviour and Redeemer? Of course He must have. Why, I bet you that irony was the one thing that kept Him going through all the black days when He saw the cross getting closer and closer, and not knowing whether He'd be able to go through with it. Where would their Our Lord and Saviour and Redeemer have been then? Do you see what I'm getting at? Next time somebody dies don't feel so bad and nearly puke up your soul. Remember—you'll probably die too. Let this ease the hurt. Remember more. You can't do anything about this cheap dirty world—that is, more than you are doing. Christ died for it, and if you ask me, the world's gotten worse since. So grow wise to these comedies."

There was a long pause. Finally Hervey said, "Remember that last night of combat?"

Cailini grinned within himself. "Sort of."

"I said something. Something about, don't let those bastard Japs get you." Another pause, then, "What a phony I was."

Cailini started, stopped massaging.

Hervey continued, "What I really meant was, don't let those bastards get you before they get me."

Voss de Lainy held the communiqué. As he read his face turned gray, and his heart seemed to have become a bursting bag of pus.

Slowly he reread the message, scrutinizing each phrase, but the words of the communiqué did not change.

He stood up, nervously lit a cigarette. With his free hand he felt his neck, and between his fingers made rolls of flesh. They slipped from his sweating grasp.

It was horrible. He couldn't believe it.

He knew such things had happened before. He had heard other officers speak of them. But always they had happened to other companies.

He moved to the tent's opening and called a runner.

"Send Sergeant Hervey here. And tell him to come immediately."

Hervey waited for Tuthill. He stood back, hidden within the coconut grove. As the squad went to eat the evening meal, he called his name.

Startled by the tone, hearing its whisper of menace, the old squad looked at each other. Imperiously they were waved on.

Tuthill had missed the tone. Cheerfully he asked, "What do you want, Sarge?"

Hervey clenched his fists. The familiarity within the word Sarge stung him to almost breaking point.

His face close to the gunner's and his voice terribly quiet, he said, "You stumbled, Tuthill."

"Stumbled? What are you talking about?"

"Adams."

"Adams?" Tuthill whispered the name. "What do you mean?"

Wearily, "Don't let's go through that."

"Through what?"

Now shouting, "That goddam farce of pretense." The jungle rang with the echo of his voice. And now quiet, "You know what I mean."

"No, Sarge."

Hervey's voice rose a little. "Tuthill, I'm not dumb. I know exactly what happened that last night of combat."

Tuthill started.

"So don't lie."

"How—?"

"So you did?" Triumph leapt from Hervey's eyes. He grabbed the man's lapels, began to shake him. "You son of a bitch! You cheap dirty son of a bitch!"

Tuthill tried to break loose.

Softly, his voice disarmingly gentle, Hervey asked, "What are you trying to do? Run away? You know you can't do that. Where's there to run to?"

"How—?"

Impatiently, "I knew from the beginning. De Lainy knows. Cailini knows. And even Robins suspects."

Tuthill cowered back.

Harshly, standing over him, Hervey said, "I ought to make you do to me what you made Adams do."

"Sarge, I—"

"But I can't. I couldn't bear to have you touch me, not even that way."

"Sarge, please listen. I—"

"And I can't kill you. I should, but something won't let me."

"Listen to me, listen—"

His eyes glittering, "But I'm going to get even somehow. I don't know how but I will."

"Adams wanted it, Sarge. He really did."

Hervey was startled.

Tuthill rushed on. "He must have been wanting it for a long time. He—"

"I suppose you just stood there and let him," Hervey said.

"That's all I did."

"You didn't work on him any!—beating him down bit by bit!—like these Washington women you're always shooting your mouth off about!"

"I didn't beat him down. I swear it. He just came to me that night. Said he couldn't stand it any longer. Said I'd be doing him a favor. Well, when he put it that way, what could I say? You know how it is, Sarge. Over two years now, stuck in these foxholes, and no women. Sarge, on the cross of Christ, that's how it was."

Hervey spat, "You lying bastard."

"No, no. Like I said. Cross of Christ. The truth."

"Adams would never have asked that. Oh, I'm not denying he might think it. But he'd never ask."

Tuthill's eyes opened wide. He took a deep breath, then admitted, "Okay, okay. So he didn't ask." His voice a whisper, "He didn't have to ask. I read his mind. I saw the look in his eyes. And I made him do what he'd always wanted to do." Almost sobbing, "So what are you blaming me for? What are you so goddam mad about? Are you crazy?—all this talk about

killing me. What did I do that's wrong? Gave the kid a good time, that's all. Gave him the guts to come through with what's behind that—that piano shit. It wasn't my fault he went running to the Jap. That's your fault. Because you're the one he really wanted. But no, you're too good for that, too goddam high and mighty. Don't talk to me, you son of a bitch. If you'd given Adams what he wanted, he wouldn't have looked at me. And he'd still be here."

His voice quiet and hurt, Hervey said, "I'm aware of that, Tuthill. You're not telling me a thing I didn't know."

"Then what's all this God Almighty act for?"

"It isn't *what* you did that makes me want to kill you."

Tuthill looked surprised, began to pick up some of his old confidence. "Then what?"

"It's *how* you did it."

Tuthill turned his head, unable to meet Hervey's accusing stare. He knew now he was trapped.

"No," Hervey continued, "I don't condemn you for what you did. You had to do that, same as you'll do it again and again. Know why? Because you're really that way yourself."

Tuthill looked at him, startled.

"You think I'm crazy?" Hervey said. "Okay, ask yourself. Has any woman ever satisfied you? Think, Tuthill. Figure it out yourself."

Again Tuthill turned away, this time to hide his contempt.

The anger began to return to Hervey's voice, mounting with each word. "Why couldn't you have been decent? A little tenderness would have made you his idol forever. And isn't that what you want? To be worshiped? But you only think that. Right now all you can do is destroy. That's the easy road of life; a dead end." Now staring at the man, seeing him for what he was, "Christ, if soul were water, you'd be a puppy's piss in the Pacific." All the weariness of eternity pushed its way into his voice. "You're without the courage to be decent or tender. They're tough things to be. The stuff that men are made of. The Cailinis of this world, the Rosinski's, and the Adams'. But you—" now the anger flamed like a bursting bomb "—you bastard—"

Hervey raised his hand.

"Don't hit me!"

Slowly Hervey forced control. His hand descended to his side as though pressing against a great weight. "Hit you?" he said. "No, I mustn't do that. I might kill you. And I want you to live. Live and find out how right I am. One day, sure enough, you'll want to do what you made Adams do. That will be my day, Tuthill. Because you'll suffer. And suffering

is a talent, imprisoning you in decency. You'll remember what I'm saying then. And you'll wish I had killed you. As this develops in you, you'll grow more baffled and hurt and lonely, because you haven't the intelligence to understand, haven't the blind faith of the tender people that gets them, for odd moments, out from under the horror. You'll become as Adams was after you had finished with him. The sad thing is you'll fall a million miles short of him because you haven't got the beauty he had."

They stood facing each other.

Finally, tremulously, Tuthill asked, "You're not going to do anything?"

"Nothing, Tuthill. You'll do enough yourself."

"Not even the lieutenant?"

"No."

"Are you going to tell the squad?"

"No."

"You mean, I can go?"

"Sure. You can go, for now."

Tuthill turned, dazed, not knowing how or what to feel. Mostly he felt glad, because, he said to himself, the discovery he had dreaded had happened, and he had escaped. Hervey's talk was crazy, but if it made him happy, that was okay with Tuthill. Hervey playing God and sucker was fine with him.

He half turned and again faced the watching Hervey. He said, "What did you mean when you said I'd stumbled?"

The glitter back in his eyes, Hervey replied, "Adams isn't dead."

It was night, and Hervey and Cailini lay in their tent. Not a word had passed between them since they had gone to bed an hour ago. Cailini could not sleep for the anxieties that raced through him. Hervey lay motionless, his eyes wide open and staring at the canvas ceiling. Cailini, believing him asleep, took care as he restlessly moved from side to side. He was surprised when Hervey suddenly said:

"Don't tell me not to use a knife on a Jap again."

Cailini did not answer. He felt unutterably miserable. From the beginning, he said to himself, his advice to Hervey had boomeranged, bringing with it the shame of inferiority. He felt that Hervey must sense this betrayal, and because the expression of his friendship was inadequate, Hervey's loneliness must move to greater poignancy. Cailini told himself he had been presumptuous, and a fool, his attempts to share no more than a pompous trespassing. Then he remembered the sin of being a fool was a mortal sin.

"Didn't you hear?"

Quietly Cailini answered, "Yes, I heard."

Another pause, long and awkward, sickening with antagonism.

"Don't you want to know why?"

"Not unless you want to tell me."

Stung, Hervey shouted, "Get that tone out of your voice. You're as bad as an overgrown kid. 'Nobody loves me.' That's what it sounds like."

"I'm sorry."

"And stop apologizing. Christ, I've had enough of that for one day."

More silence, awkwardness and antagonism.

Then, because he could not hold it any longer, Hervey said what he had been aching to say.

"They got Adams."

"Who?"

"The Japs."

"He's dead?"

"No."

Cailini was afraid to ask the next question.

Hervey said, "Seems like that kid can't die."

Almost inaudibly, "Seems so."

"That outfit that took over from you assaulted the day of relief. It was a surprise attack. Quite successful. And they found Adams."

"Was he badly hurt?"

"What do you think?"

"I suppose so."

"The Japs had been butchering him."

"No! Not that!"

"Yes! That!"

"Oh, God!"

"*God* is right."

"What—?"

"They'd gotten to the third finger."

Cailini cried out in horror.

More silence. No awkwardness. Screaming with antagonism.

At last, Cailini asked, "Will he live?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"God! That poor bastard." And after another pause, "Now what's he going to do?"

"Same thing as he always did. Put up with it. What else can he do?"

"But now he can't play."

"That's right."
"Jesus! Mary!"
"Let's hope he dies."
"Yes. Let's hope he dies."
The next silence seemed like an eternity. Then suddenly Hervey hit the ground with his fist. "Christ, but I wish I had a bottle. I'd like to get so goddam drunk."
"Me too. Me too."

Smith softly called, "Hey, Winkle! You asleep?"
"No."
"I can't sleep."
"I can't either."
"Guess it's because I slept all afternoon."
"Guess so. I did the same thing."
"Say, Winkle."
"What?"
"What do you think about the squad leader?"
"Hervey?"
"Yeah."
"Seems okay."
"Yeah, I know. But he's a moody son of a bitch, isn't he?"
"He sure is."
"You'd think with all the combat time he's got, he'd wise up."
"What do you mean?"
"Well, something must make him moody. You just don't get moody for no reason."
"I suppose so."
"You suppose? Don't you know?"
"You know what I mean. I mean yes."
"Well, say what you mean."
"Okay, okay. What were you going to say?"
"Where was I?"
"About Hervey being a moody son of a bitch. About him having a reason."
"Oh, yeah. Well, I tell you. One week after I'd been in the Army, I didn't give a shit for anything any more."
"Me too."
"And you'd think that Hervey would smarten up and do the same."
"Wouldn't you though?"
"You sure would."
"But he isn't dumb, you know."
"I know." Smith began to emphasize his words. "But here's how it is. Some guys are the smartest bastards in the world

about some things, and so damn dumb about others. Now this Hervey. He may be the best leader in the Army, but he sure is dumb not to get wise to that brooding business."

"I'll say. But do you think he is a good leader?"

"The old-timers say he is. Anyway, we'll find out soon enough."

"If we live that long!"

"Don't talk like that."

"I was only kidding."

"But I don't like that type of kidding."

"Are you scared?"

"Are you?"

"I asked you first."

"Well, a bit. Not much, but some."

"You're lying like hell. You're as scared as I am. And that's plenty."

"If only the goddam war would end!"

"Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"Tonight. Before they shove us up front."

"Yeah. Tonight."

"Right now."

"Right now."

"But—!"

"Yeah. That's what I think."

"No such luck, I guess."

"I don't guess. I know."

"Son of a bitch!"

"Isn't it though?"

"Not like it was in basic."

"Damn right."

"So long as the Japs stay over on their side!"

"That's what I say."

"And I'll stay on my side."

"But—"

"Yeah."

"I wonder what it will be like?"

"I don't even think about it."

"I can't help but think about it. I've got a wife and kid."

"That's tough."

"You know, they had no right to draft married men with kids."

"Shit on that. It's your country too."

"I know. But a married man with kids has responsibilities. It's okay for a single guy to—"

"To what? Hell, I'm single. And I want to live as bad as any married bastard."

"All the same—"

"Your wife's getting an allotment. So's the kid. They're not starving."

"But it isn't like I was with them."

"Don't hand me that."

"But supposing I get killed?"

"Your wife will get ten thousand bucks. More than you can ever give her."

"That's not the point. The kid has to be raised. And she needs a father."

"Then your wife must get some defense worker to help her."

"You're no help."

"You talk like that and I won't ever be. That gets in my craw. Jesus! Hell, it's your country like I said. Married or not. And if it comes to that, you've got more to fight for."

"But you can't seem to understand that a married man has responsibilities."

"Aw, shut up."

"But—"

"Go to sleep. For Christ's sake, go to sleep."

6

IT was barely light outside when Tuthill woke up. As he struggled up through the bog of sleep, he vaguely wondered what had disturbed him. Slowly he became aware that something was pressing on his right arm and around his waist. He elevated his head and looked down.

He smiled.

It was Rosinski. During his sleep he had moved against Tuthill. Now his head rested in the crook of the gunner's arm, and his arm and hand encircled Tuthill's waist.

Fully awake, Tuthill watched him. He was muttering something. Tuthill listened. It was a woman's name and a term of endearment.

Tuthill lay quite still, suddenly, unaccountably anxious not to disturb him.

It was quiet outside, the hushed quiet of the dawn. Stray wisps of mist trailed forlorn and lonely through the coconut groves and around the bamboo clumps. They curtained spaces, made tiny glens, partitioning the land.

Tuthill watched the sleeping face and form of Rosinski. He

remembered an old saying and felt that it was written for the Adonis. Handsome as the devil. In the feeble light of the early morning, the face was enhanced and looked as it once had. The lines cut by war were not visible. His skin, touched lightly with the tan of his ancestry, was stretched tight against his bones. It was a patrician face, and yet, mysteriously, a sinister face.

Tuthill, his own face so close to Rosinski's, took in each detail—contour and concave, line and shadow. Especially did he find a fascination in Rosinski's lips, now barely moving, speaking a dead wife's name and a soft term of endearment.

With painful care Tuthill raised his head that he might look at Rosinski's body.

The earth was bathed with light and the quiet stillness slowly dispersed. The magic of the dawn fled with the evaporating mist. A few men appeared, stood before their tents, yawned, stretched, scratched their heads, shook off the languor. With eyes still heavy with sleep, they vaguely debated within themselves what to do first. Go back to bed and try to sleep until chow? Wash? Dubbin boots? Clean a rifle? Smoke? Brush teeth? Mostly always they shuffled, still half asleep, in the direction of the company latrines.

De Lainy had awakened. Now, still in bed, his hand fumbled beside his pillow and found the cigarettes. He lit one, drew and exhaled.

De Lainy remembered that today they might be returned to the front, and three letters remained to be written. To the Zoole, Gruber and Gregory families. He breathed relief because all the others had been completed.

Slowly he turned and lay on his stomach and thighs, elevated his chest with the props of his arms, lifted his head.

It was a quietly beautiful morning. Back home in Virginia, he thought, this would be a winter's dawn. Clouds obscured the sky, but they were gray to white clouds. Today it would not rain, unless it drizzled, until noon.

He told himself to get busy on the letters. The company was alerted and they might leave at any hour. He said he really should get busy.

But he lay still, moving only to smoke his cigarette. He watched the steel-blue smoke trail from his mouth, travel a little distance, then, caught by the slight wind, saw it wrenched and flung out, blown up and torn into nothing, the wind defying him to do something about it.

More and more men began to populate the area. In some

peculiar way, he thought, with their sleep-infested faces, their slothful bodies turning this way and then that way, scratching their torsos, they fitted neatly into the panorama and added an awkward ballet life to its solemnity. Perhaps it was the drabness of their uniforms against the austere background. Perhaps their unshaven faces and tousled hair, in primitive harmony. Perhaps their unsmiling expressions. Perhaps the exuding waves of a foreboding is-this-the-day that seemed to flow as yet sluggishly from them. They were like men in some primordial age, at home in this ancient forest. And the illusion that was harmony, an integral part of this solemnly passive dawn, remained whole until they began to smoke. As the smoke swirled in their lungs, they began to cough and spit and gag. Immediately the illusion was smashed. They became what they were, aliens and trespassers in a proudly ancient place. And, seemingly, the place could not wait to have them depart, so that once again it could sink back into its majesty, its softly nodding melancholy, its aloneness and completeness.

The communion was over. De Lainy stood up. Wearily he picked up his pen, found his writing pad, sat before a wooden box that had once contained rations. Without prearranged thought, he began to write. The duty was an old one, and the ritual never varied. Always the phrases ran the same, differing only with the salutation, the name of the receiver. The manner by which the man had died fell into one of a few classifications. His hand dipped, the pen touched the paper, and the the words rapidly flowed, became sentences, paragraphs, a letter.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Zoole:

It is with deep regret that I write of your son's death. He died heroically. . . .

The morning passed uneventfully. No orders to break camp and proceed to relieve a company in combat were issued. By noon men began to hope that another day had been successfully wrested from the monster. It was observed and caustically commented upon by Captain Mennen that the company must be an assemblage of writers, for the outgoing mail was tremendous. Some men talked not at all, and some talked loud and often. Many expressed a wish that the Jesus orders would come through, then they could get the goddam thing over with. The reaction to this divided itself into two sharply distinct groups: the blackly scowling negatives, and the apprehensive but nodding positives. Comment was sharp and terse and bluntly to the point. Tempers were swift, white-hot, but of brief intensity. The President and his government were laid

open to every vile name in the language. Dire threats of revenge were promised, followed by equal vituperation against all 4-Fs, the defense workers, civilians in general, and lastly, upon that most diabolical body the devil ever incarnated, HQ and HQ staff.

The hour of noon rolled around, and the company began to expel its breath in a long sigh of relief. Why they did that was a source of puzzlement to Hervey. The hour of departure could be any hour of the day or night. In fact, it usually was night. The brass seemed to delight in arousing men from sleep, getting them to pack, then to wait in line—sometimes to wait for several hours, a length of time comparable to what it would have taken to have slept that night in bed.

Then why this sudden noon business? Was there something symbolic about noon? Later Hervey heard that a rumor had been circulated. Something about a new procedure. He waved a disgusted hand, was about to reply, telling them not to be such gullible fools, and then he remembered it would quiet them, keep the anguish and anxiety in abeyance. So he said with a knowing tone, "Could be, you know. Could be."

They retired to their tents, determined to make the most of this day, for surely it must be the last of the present bivouac. Yes, they were going to make the most of this day—so they went to their tents and, largely, slept.

Hervey stood before the opening of de Lainy's tent. Seeing the lieutenant was alone, he grinned and asked, "How's the brass today?"

De Lainy looked up. "Come on in, Bill."

Seated, Hervey said, "What do you know?"

"Nothing much. Do you?"

"Not a damn thing."

"What's this? A call? Or were you going someplace?"

"Both."

"Going to see one of your stooges?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You must think I'm a dumb son of a bitch."

"I think you're crazy."

De Lainy laughed. "What's it worth to tell you where you were going, who you were going to see and what you intended to find out?"

"Judging from the smirk that's plastered all over your silly Rebel face, not a damn cent."

"What's the matter? Too yellow to risk your money?"

"Not yellow. Smart. I'm no crazy Rebel."

"Fate was unkind to you."

"I wouldn't be found dead south of the Mason-Dixon." He looked down at the lieutenant's feet. "Look at you. Barefooted. Can't get it out of your stupid head this isn't Virginia. Hell, man, there's no cowshit around here to feel between your toes."

"Watch out! One insubordination charge coming up."

"Right in character. Now he pulls his rank."

"Look, do you want to take that bet or not?"

"No."

"I'll tell you anyway. You were going to the CP tent."

"Considering that the CP tent is next door, and there's no place else to go, apart from the john, that is, your observation is remarkably brilliant."

"You were going to see if you could find out when the company is going to leave."

"That being the paramount and only question of interest right now, and without wishing to seem repetitious, another brilliant observation. You know, you should write detective stories."

"And your stooge—the company clerk."

That did startle Hervey.

De Lainy laughed. "Want to know how I know?"

"How?"

"I've known since I first came here. I'll tell you, though I don't see why I should throw away a good trump card. We were in New Guinea, waiting for orders. I knew the date and the hour, and so did every other officer in the outfit. And there the secret supposedly ended. Well, we were standing around in the CP tent. Then you came in. Apparently, judging from the expression on your face, you didn't expect to see us there. But you found your wits pretty quick. You walked over to the clerk, started to talk casually to him. Yet the words you spoke weren't in keeping with the question in your eyes. That's when I sat up and took notice. The clerk, no moron himself, also saw that insistence. And he was your friend. He stopped typing. He dropped one hand and rested the other, nonchalantly enough, on the typewriter roll. I noticed that his thumb and little finger were curled under his palm, leaving three fingers outstretched. Then he asked you a question. Did you think the rain would let up by tomorrow? But he overdid it. There was a trace of emphasis in his voice. Then I saw that you had understood whatever was passed, because the insistence had gone from your eyes. Remembering our orders were for 0300 hours the following day, it wasn't hard to figure out."

Hervey grinned. "Must be some Yankee blood in you somewhere."

"An inverse compliment, but I thank you. And though I refute your words, I'll retain the emotion that prompted them."

De Lainy took out his cigarettes, offered Hervey one. They lit.

"You looked kind of pensive when I arrived," Hervey said. "Something bothering you?"

"Not particularly. Maybe those letters I finished this morning."

"Casualty nearest of kin?"

"Yes."

There was a pause.

Hervey asked, "Have you heard from that March woman recently?"

"No. Not for over a month."

"So that's what's bothering you."

"Are you playing Sherlock now?"

And Hervey, a frown lining his face, looked hard at de Lainy.

The lieutenant said, "What are you staring at?"

"I was wondering if I should tell you something."

"What about?"

"Your March woman."

"I don't get you."

"Well, you see—" He opened his mouth, hesitated, closed it and opened it again. Then it came with a rush. "You see I knew her."

De Lainy was amazed. "You did?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I saw no point in telling you."

"Hell, man—"

"I didn't know her too well. It was only a nodding acquaintance. I knew more *of* her than I knew her. We were introduced once though. It was in Washington. Some hell of an Embassy party my old man got me to go to."

"It's a small world."

"Not so small. The world is big. Only cliques are small."

"I suppose so. Well, what did you think of her?"

"I knew you'd ask that. That's probably why I didn't tell you before."

"I see."

"You really want to know what I think?"

"Go ahead."

"I don't think much of her at all."

"Go on."

"She's sort of cute. Good figure. Looks pretty."

"And—"

"And nothing. As far as I could see, that's where she ended."

De Lainy did not reply.

"A cold woman. No generosity. No tenderness. No passion. I wouldn't call her selfish, because she wasn't even infatuated with March. That's what I meant when I said no passion. Neither for herself or anybody else. The first time I saw her I gave her a name. The Glass Woman. She has substance, as glass has. That's her body. And like glass, without receptivity. There, yet not there."

De Lainy said, "You're wrong, you're wrong."

Hervey shrugged. "Well, it's only my opinion. Take it for what it's worth."

"You just don't know her. If you did, you'd think different."

"What's your opinion of her?"

"She has feeling. I know she has. But she finds expression difficult. I think she's afraid. Really developed inside but hiding herself."

"That's not your mind speaking. You're wishing. Hoping."

De Lainy looked down, studied his cigarette. Finally he said, "Yes, I know."

After a moment, Hervey said, "You've got it bad, haven't you?"

De Lainy nodded.

"You're going to get hurt."

"Maybe."

"Can you cut her out?"

"No."

"Have you tried?"

He raised his eyes, looked at Hervey. He did not need to speak.

They began to think their separate thoughts, Hervey of de Lainy, and de Lainy of Hervey.

They remembered that they had known each other a year, since de Lainy's inception into the company. A year was a long time in the infantry, equaled only by a generation of civilian friendship. The fact that they had known each other in prewar days they disregarded. Then it had been an acquaintanceship. Their lives, brought into contact through the circle they moved within (as Hervey had said, only cliques were small), had casually touched and had turned away, each life intent only upon its own distinct and separate business. When de Lainy had assumed command of the 1st Platoon, Hervey did not know whether to be pleased or sorry. He had said to Cailini that it was like having your mother-in-law come to live with you. So

when the officer had smiled, put out his hand and said, "William Hervey, isn't it? Senator Hervey's son!" he had inwardly cringed, but outwardly he returned the gesture and said he was glad to have him as the new platoon leader. Slowly they had grown to know each other, and as their knowledge deepened, a mutual respect and admiration was born. They became aware of the fact that certain prejudices were dear to them. Foremost was the Army. For the Army, with its consistency in taking itself so seriously, its phony front and phonier inside, it's Deity complex, its intolerance of everything—and often its intolerance of itself—its rituals and querulousness, was a constant source of amusement to them. And it remained a source of amusement as long as Hervey and de Lainy were strong. They discovered, however, much to their disgust, they were not always able to remain strong.

The real Army, the part that created their amusement, the brass and authority, stayed at home. What little part of it was in the Philippines did not stand up to its waist in mud and water for weeks on end, it did not crawl endless miles on its belly in treacherous jungles, it did not eat the same revolting food day after week after month. It was newly shaved and freshly showered. It was attended to, its slightest whim dispatching a retinue of feverishly scurrying men to produce whatever was needed to meet its caprice. So it remained strong, always. And de Lainy and Hervey were often weak. Fortunately, when one was weak, the other was usually strong, and under such conditions their friendship began and grew. They pooled their moods, and managed, though only they knew how sloppily, to seesaw a continuity of stability through the long campaigns.

The present situation found de Lainy the weaker of the two. Hervey had, for a brief moment, rid himself of his melancholy and his hate. Though he still brooded over what had happened to Adams, though Norah hourly moved farther and farther away, he was soothed by the knowledge that very shortly they would be in action again—doing something, not just lying around, not thinking, remembering and building hate.

And de Lainy was low. More than ever his blood felt like mud. The morning letters to the casualties' nearest of kin continued to depress him, and the absence of a letter from March alarmed him. He was sick of fighting, and here they were, waiting again for combat.

The longer he waited inactive, the more he thought of March. He remembered again and again how in the past she and her letters, inadequate as they had been, had been his one source of hope.

But for March and her letters, de Lainy knew, he would be like Hervey. For he had often looked at the sergeant. Somehow he could not envision him as married, settled down, the father of kids. He could not help but believe that Hervey, despite his flooding sense of futility, was really at home—the only home he would ever know—when in battle.

Now, looking at Hervey, de Lainy asked himself: What when it is all over?—what when uniforms hang in the closets of America, untouched but by the moths? Then, with no one dependent on him, no one following, with only the bitterness yawning inside him, no outlet of Jap bellies and a thrusting knife to ebb his tide of hate, what then?

De Lainy chose not to answer that. Instead, he asked: What of myself? Where do I fit into all this?

He told himself he mustn't die. There was March. In the past she had pulled him through, and he was sure she would do it again. Hell, he said, you can't go on forever putting out to men, giving, sacrificing. As much as you wanted to, you knew you had to have something coming in. And there was March. There must be March.

He moved restlessly, felt again his heart was a bursting bag of pus. He said it was too bad about Hervey. Too bad he didn't have a March.

Then he paused, asking himself: Too bad?

De Lainy sighed so deeply his whole body shuddered. He said: Maybe Hervey's better off. Who can say?

Finally, explosively: Who can say a goddam thing?

BOOK FIVE

1

HERVEY strode from the Command Post to the area where his squad was encamped. They saw him coming, noticed the firmness of his walk, nudged the man next to them, felt the pricking tremor of alarm that ran over them.

"All right, you guys," Hervey shouted. "Let's go."

A stark fear froze them. Only their eyes lived, wide open, staring, terror nakedly rooted there.

One replacement licked his suddenly dry lips, and with a hushed voice, asked, "This—this it?"

"That's right. This is where we go and win that goddam war. Seems like they can't do it without us."

He looked around, feeling their beseeching hope hit him, that he would grin and say it was only a joke. The old-timers were worse than the replacements. But then, they knew what they were returning to. The replacements, though they were satiated with fearful misgivings before the mysterious unknown, could not imagine a horror as horrible as the horror was.

Hervey wondered what he could say to break the terror, what he might do to give them ease, to bring the slight comforting realization that they were a squad and not the poignantly isolated individuals they now felt themselves to be.

Smith, the Hungry One, his voice quivering with indignation, shouted, "You mean—you mean those bastards have the nerve to send us up before we eat?"

Shocked, each man paused, felt the scattered fragments of himself rush back, became again a member of a mass. Those who were standing leaned back on their heels, those sitting leaned on the base of their spines, and they all opened their mouth, laughter suddenly bellowing forward.

Camp was rapidly broken. Tents were knocked down. Slit

trenches were filled in. Guns in the process of being cleaned were hastily assembled. Partially written letters were abruptly concluded, addressed, collected. A hundred miscellaneous chores quickly finished. Then they all sat around and waited.

They told themselves they were extremely fortunate, for two things happened that afternoon that diverted them from utter and complete misery. First, the rain held off until they were under the protecting covers of the trucks that transported them up front. Second, a wonderful announcement was issued. There would be a mail call before departure.

Later the letters were distributed.

And there was even one from March.

The first squad and de Lainy rode in the leading truck. The men talked, fell silent, then talked again. They talked to disguise rather than to dispel their fear. Nothing could dispel it. So they talked, drunkenly, completely out of character.

"Hey, Sarge!" Rosinski called.

"What?"

"Tuthill got a letter from that woman."

"What woman?"

"You know, the tomato that had his kid."

"Oh! That one."

"Yeah. She sent a picture too. Swell-looking dish! Boy, what gams! And you should have been her g'knockers." In the dark he cupped his hands. "Like this! Great day in the morning! I sure would like to park my shoes under her bed. . . . And I'd like to do it *right now*." He turned to Tuthill, and in his loneliness felt an affection for him. "How come a homely son of a bitch like you gets something like that to wrap itself around you?"

From all sides chorused, "Yeah, how come?"

Tuthill could have hugged Rosinski in that moment. He told himself this was something for that crazy bastard Hervey to chew on. He expanded with a pride of accomplishment.

"You're jealous of a good man."

They laughed. "What did you do? Hit her over the head with something, then rape her?"

Smith asked, "Where's she from?"

"Same place as me. Washington, D.C."

Lunagan shouted, "That explains everything."

Tuthill said, "I met her in Constitution Hall."

Rosinski had been waiting for this moment. "You met her in Constipation Hall?"

They roared over that.

To the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," Rosinski began to sing:

Oh, Tuthill's got—a bouncing baby boy,
Oh, Tuthill's got—a bouncing baby boy,
Oh, Tuthill's got—a bouncing baby boy,
And for once he can't blame me.

Cutting through the babel of laughter, Hervey suddenly asked, "You got Army insurance, Tuthill?"

In a what's-it-to-you-voice, Tuthill answered, "Yes."

"How much?"

"Ten grand."

"Who is your beneficiary?"

"My mother."

"To all of it?"

"Yes," adding, with an emphasis of suspicion, "why?"

A little too persuasively, Hervey said, "Don't you think—just in case something should happen to you over here—that you ought to provide that kid with a means of support?"

"Hell, no. Why should I? The brat don't mean nothing to me."

Before he could stop, Hervey had shouted, "You cheap son of a bitch!" Now, his voice still cutting, but controlled, he continued, "Look, you brought it into this mess, and if you're not able to rear it, if you won't rear it, the least you can do is to support it."

Tuthill pouted, "I didn't ask for it."

Dryly, "I don't suppose its mother did either. So all around, between the two of you, the kid takes the rap. And you know—" his voice became almost inaudible, promising, menacing "—you can't be irresponsible about the results of your *fun* all the time."

"Aw! It's just a bastard."

"You think so? You're the bastard."

From all sides of the truck came murmurs of endorsement. Tuthill's pride of accomplishment rapidly drained.

"Look!" said Hervey, "it's tough to be born a bastard. You're something that people can laugh at. And by laughing at you, they make themselves big. You know, Tuthill—powerful. Yes, that's the word. And in this case, it will be hurting your kid. Of course, being a bastard actually doesn't mean a thing, except to stupid and vicious and obscene minds. Now your kind won't ever get to feel he's anything else but a bastard unless he gets educated. With an education, he'll grow up to know

that the majority of all living people are accidental—second-degree bastards."

Tuthill growled, "Mighty high talk there!"

Rosinski's voice shot forward. "Mighty high talk, my ass. It's common sense. And, besides, it's the only decent thing you can do."

Tuthill felt trapped. His position in the squad was already precarious. Although no one but Hervey had indicted him for the Adams incident, none of them had been very friendly toward him since then. He was slowly being relegated to a position comparable to Lunagan's. Somehow, subconsciously, the squad had been unable to forgive the fact that he had been asleep when Adams had walked into the night. Tuthill knew, all too well, the fragility of the thread by which he was now accepted. It was as though they stood a distance from him, with Tuthill on parole, and they waiting for the swing of their emotion before they accepted him or rejected him. The replacements Tuthill disregarded. He could do nothing about them, for they were as yet without character. Automatically they would move with the mood and the power of the old squad. It was Rosinski and Polson and Robins and Lunagan he knew he must angle for. Hervey and Cailini had dismissed him, but he knew they would never speak their thoughts to the other squad members. Openly they would accept him as they had always done. Hervey was too experienced and cautious a leader to allow a rift in the squad, a rift, that, under the pressure of combat, might widen, might dangerously throw them all away from each other and destroy their oneness.

Yet, Tuthill said to himself, ten thousand dollars was a hell of a lot of money to pay for a friendship. Immediately he became the Tuthill of old, the emotional animal.

Hotly he spoke up. "What about my mom and pop? They brought me up. Don't you think they should have it?"

Several men ceased their endorsement at that. Tuthill smiled in the darkness.

"You told me once," Hervey said quietly, "that both your mother and father were government workers, and that they were scheduled for pensions. No doubt they could use your insurance, but actually they don't need it—" adding fiercely, "—do they?"

"Well—"

"Don't lie. I've got an almost infallible memory."

After a long pause, seeking an evasion and being unable to produce one, Tuthill was compelled reluctantly to admit, "No,

they don't need it—" adding hurriedly, furiously, "—but they sure could use it."

"That's their tough luck. You should have thought about that before you fooled around."

"I had no idea—"

Dryly, "No, I don't suppose you did. Seems to be a habit with you. But it's done now, and, as Rosinski said, the only decent thing you can do is to give the kid a break."

Tuthill remained reluctant, but now the tide of squad sympathy had completely swung against him. He knew, for his own sake, he must swim with it. The war stretched ahead, its length trailing endlessly into the future, its end buried somewhere in the time-distant land of Japan. He knew he could not walk through that space alone. He must sign the paper! He must! Emotionally he realized that it was the only gesture that would earn their friendship, the one way back into the fraternity.

Under his breath he cursed Hervey. Smart son of a bitch! Too smart for his own soul! Well, he'd sign the paper. But it wasn't going to do anybody any good. Neither Hervey nor the bastard. He wasn't going to die. And when he got home again the kid could go screw itself.

The words he spoke dropped slowly from his mouth.

"I'll do it next time we hit bivouac."

Hervey demanded, "What's wrong with now?"

"There aren't any forms around."

De Lainy smiled in the darkness and hid a malignant satisfaction, saying, "Sure, there are. I've got some blanks. Didn't you know, Tuthill, the American Army is never without its red tape?"

Tuthill complained, "But it's dark."

"We have a flashlight."

"The light will be seen."

"Not if we group and circle the beam."

There was a movement, forms were produced, the Change of Beneficiary extracted. As he signed, Tuthill found it impossible to resist his challenge. His voice said, "I'm not going to die," but his tone implied, "If you think this is going to do that bastard one bit of good, you're crazy!—all of you!"

De Lainy ignored the implication and answered only to the spoken words, uttering the stereotyped reply, "Nobody is going to die."

Neither he nor Hervey spoke of the expected tenacity of the pending Jap resistance, yet they all knew it was to be street fighting, the most bitter of all bitter combat.

2

WHEN de Lainy had first read the letter from March, he had felt a vivid sense of emptiness. All his warm inside seemed suddenly to have become a cavern of cold nothingness.

March had written that this letter would be her last. For March had married. She said she was sorry. There were many sentences of regret, and, finally, she said she hoped their friendship would in no way suffer.

Now, riding to the front, de Lainy bitterly remembered what Hervey had said. The Glass Woman. Sure, that's what she was. No feeling. No passion. Nothing. How else could she have married wealthy George Epes? A gnome of a man, small and shriveled, almost seventy. Even death hesitated to embrace George.

Sitting next to Hervey, he felt his nudge, heard the sergeant's undertone. "March trouble, Lieutenant?"

He nodded dully.

"Forget it."

"I can't."

"Women like March are like Japs, only good when they're dead, or lost to you."

He did not reply.

Fiercely Hervey whispered his warning. "You'd better forget about her. We're heading for trouble. And you know how big it is. So you'd better forget. Because you'll need all your wits if we're to pull through."

De Lainy answered sharply, "I'll be all right. Just leave me alone."

He sunk his head in his hands, he closed his eyes—and he saw them both, together, spitting in the face of Aphrodite. Finally, when he could stand the torment no longer, and because he knew Hervey watched him, he whispered, "Life is one bastard."

"I know what you mean." Then, almost savagely, "But forget it. Goddam!—you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. And I'm trying."

"Trying isn't good enough."

De Lainy did not reply, and a long silence fell between them. They did not hear the noise of the jolting truck, the breathing and coughing of men, the talk and nervous laughter,

the rattle of rifles and machine guns, the spitting of the roaring rain hitting the canvas roof.

Finally de Lainy said, "You know something?"

"What?"

"Sometimes I think that life is really death, and only death is life."

But Hervey merely shrugged, suddenly impatient, and lapsed into a deep and tight silence.

Shortly after midnight the truck arrived at their destination. Quietly the men alighted. Silence was imperative now. They were close to the front line.

In the distance, springing at them from out the rain-soaked blackness, could be heard the frequent rattle of machine-gun fire, the short and sharp *huffs* of bursting grenades, the crackling crunch of mortar shells, and, over it all, the more imperious bark of heavy artillery. Always the intermittent spaces of lesser sound were punctuated by the pinging of rifle shots.

In single file they were led over fields and into a grove that grew south of the town. Here, under dipping banana trees and bamboo clumps, they set up a transient perimeter of defense. Here they would remain until dawn, until the time when they were moved into the van of the salient to relieve a company scheduled for bivouac.

The first squad took its stand in the perimeter. Guards were posted, and subsequent guard relief announced. They prepared to wait, to sweat out the suspense until dawn, now still five hours away.

Cailini felt he had to talk to someone. He called to his neighbor, "Hey, Rosie!"

Rosinski crept the distance to where Cailini lay.

"What do you know?" Cailini asked.

"I know I'm nearly messing my pants."

"Me too."

"Where's the Sarge?"

"Checking something or other." After a pause, "You still the assistant AR man?"

"Damn it, yes."

"Why 'damn it'?"

"I swear I get all the crappy assignments of this squad. Last time I was with that Martha-jibbering Robins. This time I'm with Tuthill."

"I thought you liked Tuthill."

"I don't know. Used to. Sort of gone off him lately."

"Why?"

"Don't know for sure. Just gone off him."

"He bothers you?"

"No. Recently he's gone out of his way to be decent."

"That's not like Tuthill."

"I know. And it seems so funny. I guess that Adams business must have got him."

"What do you mean?"

"Him being asleep and all that when it happened. That must have hit him. You know, he was always sleeping his own watch. Now with the squad growing less friendly, he's—I guess—lonely. That's why he's started to talk so much recently. He even asks me if there's anything he can do for me."

"What does he usually talk about?"

"Women. You know Tuthill. My God, sometimes I think half of Washington must have been his harem. He really got around." Rosinski laughed. "You and me should take a trip there sometime, Bob."

"Is that all he talks about?"

"Mostly that, though he does want me to talk about the women I've known. But, hell, I only knew a couple before I met my wife. You know," Rosinski said, after a pause, "now I come to think of it, that's what's putting me off of Tuthill. Yeah, that's it. Funny, I never thought about it before. But that's it all right." He shrugged. "Well, he can keep on asking. He's the last person I'd tell about my wife. You know, Bob, that's something—well—sacred. I can tell you. I feel you understand. I could even tell Robins if it weren't for that other thing we once talked about. But Tuthill—hell, no! He's—he's vulgar. Wants to know such things like, how many times a night can I. You know, if he keeps that up, I'll be telling him where to head in."

"Might be a good idea to tell him at the beginning. Save yourself a lot of frustration."

"You don't like Tuthill, do you?"

Cailini stalled. "What makes you say that?"

"Oh, come off it. You and Hervey and the lieutenant think you're the only ones with eyes around here."

"You're crazy!"

"I don't know what's come between you and Tuthill, but you nearly puke every time you speak to him."

"Let's forget about him."

"Okay. What do you want to talk about?"

"I don't know," Cailini said. "Just talk. Talk about anything, but for Christ's sake keep on talking."

"Hey! What's up? You low? Something wrong?"

Suddenly, absurdly, Cailini wanted to weep.

"What is it?" Rosinski insisted.

"I don't know. I just don't feel so hot."

"Sick?"

"Yeah. Sick in my mind. Sick in my heart. Sick in my soul."

"Not in your body though?"

"No."

"Aw, you're just jittery because we're going back up there. The old butterflies."

"I wish that were all it is."

"What else?"

"I'm worried."

"What about?"

"I know it's crazy, but I've got a hunch."

"That's talking damn silly."

"I know. But I can't help it. I've got a feeling that—"

"*That* what?"

"You'll laugh. You should if you don't. Because you're right. Hunches are silly. Superstition. That's all."

"Spill it."

"You know, Rosie, you know how I've always talked about the war, the combat and then bivouac, and then combat again, as sort of being chapters in a book?"

"Yeah."

"Well, the hunch is, that this is the last chapter. The finish. All over."

"For you?"

"I don't know."

"Then who for?"

"Hervey."

Rosinski wondered what he could say that might ease Cailini. After a pause, "I know what's really wrong with you. It's because we're going back up there. That's all it is. I felt like hell myself coming up on the truck. That's why I shot my big mouth off so much."

"But—"

"You'll be okay tomorrow, once we get in there punching. You'll see."

"I know I'm acting like a kid and I'm a man now. But, Jesus Christ! I feel rotten. I feel like I'm dead. Dead and wandering around. Can't find heaven. Can't find hell. And can't find purgatory. I've got a lump in me that's like a ton."

"Maybe you are sick. Something you ate. Stick your finger down your throat and make yourself puke."

"No, that's not it. That won't help."

"Want me to get the aid-man?"

"No."

"Well, is there anything I can do? Anything at all?"

"Yes."
"What?"
"Talk. Keep on talking."

After he had completed his duties, de Lainy moved away from his platoon and sat under a tree. He lit a cigarette under the cover of his poncho, drew long and deep, then swiftly, gratefully, shot the smoke into the darkness.

"Hey! Lieutenant!"

Startled, de Lainy turned to see who whispered his name.

"It's me! Hervey!"

"What do you want?"

The figure loomed close, and then he saw there were two people.

"Who is that with you?"

Hervey grinned. "A woman."

"God's sake! Who is she? Where did she come from?"

"She's from San Fernando. The town we'll see tomorrow. I caught her hiding in the woods. She's a Filipina."

"What's she doing here? Taking cover?"

"I guess so. She can't speak English outside of a couple of words. And only then to say she's hungry."

"Why bring her to me? Feed the bitch if you like. Then send her down the line."

"Lieutenant!" Hervey mocked. "Now just how far back of the lines do you think she'd get?"

"What do you mean—?" Then, as enlightenment struck him, "Oh, I see."

"You know GIs!"

"Well, even so, I can't help that. She can't stay here. We move on in four hours."

The sergeant laughed quietly. "A man can have a lot of fun in four hours."

"Hervey," de Lainy reproached. "You're not like—"

"Like what?" Hervey snapped.

"Like, well, you know."

Now, quietly savage, "Don't give me that Christian Endeavor crud. That's okay when you're a kid and back home. But we're not kids and we're not back home. We're at war. We're going into combat. Goddam your soul, a whole platoon's lives are in your hands. And right now, feeling the way you do over that letter, you can't deliver the lead. You're all mixed up. You can't think straight. Well, by Jesus, you'd better straighten yourself out. If you don't, you'll make a mistake. I don't care for myself, but I do care for the platoon. If I die—that's fine. But if the platoon dies—that's bad. They want to live. They've

got guts enough to go on living. Guts or stupidity. God knows which."

De Lainy was stung to whisper fiercely, "I said I'd forget the woman. I said I'd forget the trouble."

"Sure! Sure you did! But you lied. You lied to both of us."

De Lainy was so angry he could hardly speak. "I could kill you."

Hervey was shocked. He did not reply.

Then, contrite, de Lainy said, "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. Forgive me."

"Forget it."

Now de Lainy laughed. "You mothering me?"

"So what? You've done the same for me."

The laugh became rueful. "Yeah. It has been a sort of weaning."

"We made out. Does it matter how?"

"Hell, no."

There was a silence until de Lainy asked, "About this Filipina?"

"Oh, yeah. Take her. Give the gal a good time."

"I want my woman, not any woman."

"I've wanted T-bone steaks. Since I came overseas, I've wanted steaks. Instead I ate hardtack biscuits."

Hervey turned to leave, pausing to say, "Too bad this little Flip wasn't around when Maxie Dubois got his. You know, she might have saved his life." Hervey paused, then said, "Vossy—"

"What?"

"You think if we applied to the War Department we might get a woman put on every platoon's inventory?—so much essential equipment?"

But he was gone before de Lainy could reply.

3

THE Filipina and de Lainy stood looking at each other. Neither could see much. Form alone was discernible, being patches of blackness that were darker than the night. Suddenly embarrassed, de Lainy said, "Sit down."

She did not move, then he remembered she spoke no English, only Tagalog or some native patois. He sat down himself, patted the earth. She chuckled with delight because she

understood; and obeyed. Sitting close to him, she said, "Joe."

"Hungry, Joe!"

He reached into his jungle pack, took out some candy bars and gave them to her. Pausing only to nod her head, thanking him, she tore open the wrappers and voraciously ate the chocolate.

Again she nodded her thanks.

She continued to sit, eying him, waiting. But he made no motion. Finally, a little puzzled, she leaned over and brushed her lips against his. He pushed her away, quickly and with repulsion. That she understood. Americans were not unfamiliar to her.

Some Joes were like that. They would do lots of things. They play with your breasts, ran their fingers over your body, took sex, but some would not kiss. She knew now she should not have kissed this one. She could not afford to offend him. There might be more candy.

Again leaning toward him, she placed her hand on his chest, and over his combat uniform made little circling motions.

He was about to push her away again when, arrested by a thought, he stopped. He said he wanted to satisfy his curiosity to see how far she would go. He reminded himself that he was Virginian, and although he could see no details of the Filipina, he knew she must be colored.

She continued her play, and he refused to recognize the voluptuous content that began to invade him.

Looking at her, he saw a diminutive creature. She could not have been as tall as his chest. Like a child. And yet he could see by the silhouette contours that she was beautifully formed, her body a pattern of symmetry.

Responding to the pressure of her hand, he lay back. She translated that as a symbol of his submission. Slowly she unbuttoned his blouse, then unbuckled his belt. Her hand placed inside, she began to caress his chest. Slowly, moving lower and lower, her hand traveled over the abdominal wall, and she liked the hard resistance of the stomach ridge.

De Lainy's hand moved out and closed over her wrist. When he savagely pulled her to him, she became frightened and began to whimper. "No—no, Señor."

He laughed harshly. "Yes, Señorita. Oh, but yes."

He had to have her now. Hervey was right. Hardtack biscuits were T-bone steaks when you were starving. His limbs were molten, an unbearable heaviness lay in his groins.

As she struggled, he pinned her down.

"No, Señor, no! Please! Please!"

Through his teeth, he said, "Come on. You can struggle harder than this."

His arms encircled her. His knees pried open her legs. She began to cry. That made him happy. It furthered his passion. Holding her under him, he reached up between her breasts and ripped the sack that clothed her, leaving her naked.

As he pressed against her, she cried aloud in pain. He gagged her with kisses; he had not heard. Now he was talking. "March! March! March!"

When the first streaks of dawn crossed the mountains, he gave her all the rations he had, and Hervey contributed his.

It was difficult to convince her that she could not continue with them.

She pointed to the town where the battle raged, clung to de Lainy, begged to be allowed to accompany him.

Both Hervey and de Lainy shook their heads, in denial and amazement.

Looking at her, they shrugged with incomprehension.

BOOK SIX

1

FROM a position south of the town of San Fernando they assaulted. Against alarmingly heavy and tenacious opposition an advancement was slowly forced into the town. It was, as street fighting has always been, the most bitter of all ruthless combat. They hated it as much as they feared it.

More than ever the advantage lay with the defenders. Each house was an enemy foxhole—admirable cover from which to release fire. Always the Japs were concealed behind Nipa frames or protected by concrete walls. They stayed behind the walls and frames until the assaulting American waves penetrated to points vulnerably close, then, with ease and comparative safety, retreated to new positions of defense, behind more camouflage and other concrete walls.

It was the madness of all war's madnesses. To assault—shells spitting close to one, kicking around feet, seeing men fall; to expose oneself, to have to expose oneself in order to take the next house and what the next house would contain; to gamble life, one's own life; to hope to exact cover protection in that wild and desperately tiny advance to the next house before rifles and machine guns were focused effectively upon one; to hope that the next house would be empty of the enemy; to pass through torment and hazard—and then, when all of that was accomplished, to have taken perhaps half a block. And, on raising one's eyes, to see that an identical procedure lay straight ahead.

It told of another journey through hell. It screamed of past luck, frighteningly whispered that next time—!

Men swore and raved. Men sweated with exquisite apprehension. They raised their fists, and their mouths slobbering, they wildly, incoherently jabbered obscenities, heaped every curse they knew upon the civilians back home, their government, their mothers who had conceived them, and sometimes, upon the Japs.

Jowanowitch, in a brief moment of lull, turned to Smith, the Hungry One and, unshed tears glistening in his eyes, his heart pumping laboriously, his throat dry and parched, his hands trembling, sobbed aloud, "They didn't kid back home, eh, Smith? Didn't kid when they said we'd seen nothing yet?"

And Smith, the butterflies madly jitterbugging in his stomach, wanting to puke but only able to gag, neither affirmed nor denied. He was too busy lamenting the fact that he would never see America again.

The retreating enemy left behind them innumerable and ingenious booby traps.

Szymczak and Lunagan combed a house, searching for a possible hidden enemy. Szymczak, still affectionately known as Ouija, saw a picture hanging crookedly on the wall. Automatically his hand went out to straighten it. Lunagan, seeing him, wildly shouted, falling to the floor as he did so. There was a terrific crack of sound, a lesser muffled boom. The house rocked. Plaster and debris half buried the inert Lunagan. He jumped up, raising his trembling fist, and over the torn and dead body, screamed, "You fool! You christly, silly, stupid, goddam fool!" He sobbed, "Why didn't you listen to Hervey? He told you. Yes, he did. I heard him tell you. He told you not to straighten crooked pictures, not to lie on beds, not to sit on commodes. Imbecile! Now you know." Lunagan almost spat on the bleeding body. "You might have killed me." And looking around, seeing the holed walls and floor, cut by bomb fragmentation, he shook with new terror as the full impact of the narrowness of his escape hit him. Sweating from every pore, barely able to walk, he stumbled from the room.

The enemy swung their gunfire between small arcs. As the one route of advancement lay through the street or the back alleyways, GIs were compelled to move forward into a territory Jap-protected by massed crossfire. Man after man fell. The enemy picked them off the roofs, pored lead into them as they poised to throw grenades, waited until they began to climb into the windows, and then, when they were comparatively stationary targets, shot them down with casual ease, laughing as they did so, delighted with their success.

The advance was snail slow. Houses had to be combed. Any undiscovered enemy, shooting from the rear, would be an impossible hazard. Often, with battle cunning, the hidden enemy permitted a squad to advance unmolested, but the moment other GIs came forward—believing that area cleared—were mercilessly wiped out. This left the salient squad trapped, and it was a legendary occasion when a man escaped.

With implacable tread the ferocity of the battle swelled. It swelled as the increasing awareness of fear stabbed within each heart. New deaths. More ripped bodies. Out of one horror only to plunge headfirst into new and greater horror. Alvance. No pause. Thrust the enemy back. Thrust him back regardless of cost. If you died, so what? Some new Joe would fill your place. Men a dime a dozen. A limitless pool where you came from. Men nothing before the importance of taking San Fernando. That alone was imperative—to wrest from the enemy this miserable cluster of bamboo slums that stood in the center of a jungle. Do that. Pay the cost. Blood. Limbs. Bodies. Tears. Sweat. Pay it. The country that wanted the town would pay. It had the price. You were the price. Okay, pay with you. And don't bitch, Joe. Be big. Pay. It was your fault. You shouldn't have been born a member of a mighty race. You should have been born an Eskimo in some obscure Baffinland. But you weren't. So pay and don't bitch. This is your payment to Democracy and Freedom. You want Democracy and Freedom, don't you, Joe? Okay, okay, okay. Then shut your yap. Be a man. Be a patriot. Watch your blood flow and feel your life ebb. Sink to your knees with glory shining from your eyes. And be glad, because they'll raise monuments to you. Sure, big monuments whose peaks will touch the clouds and hold communion with God. The God you're now on your way to face. So make your confession. Quick, Joe. This life is ebbing fast. Soon now these suntanned limbs, these rippling muscles, this proud head, this once vibrant soul, this miracle that was you, so soon now will be a stiff kissing the sucking mud. Yes, Joe, you, kissing the mud. Isn't that symbolic? Back to the mud from which you sprang. So open your big yap only to shout: Hallelujah. Open your yap only to confess to your God. You're honored and privileged. You're dying for Democracy and Freedom. Shout that with what little breath you have left. And be glad. Now don't bitch. Stop cursing. Stop being a child. Aren't you listening? You're dying for Democracy and Freedom. So, Joe, why are you screaming: Fuck Democracy and Freedom? Imbecile. You've got your words mixed. This is honor and glory and privilege. Stupid. Monuments will be raised to you. To you. None other. So get your words straight, Joe. Meet your Maker with happiness. Know you gave everything you had to the cause. Know you are Our Glorious Dead.

2

HERVEY, checking on his men, saw that with the exception of Ouija the squad remained intact. He told himself their luck had been phenomenal. They had assaulted, and they had laid down a covering fire as another squad had assaulted. The procedure was repeated again and again. It was the method of combat assault, a cooperative shuttling of teams.

During a momentary lull in the fighting, de Lainy suddenly turned to Hervey and, above the noise of battle, shouted, "Black ape! That's what she was! Black ape!"

Hervey shouted back, "What's that?"

"That Filipina last night."

Hervey turned and looked at him. He saw de Lainy's eyes blazing with anger, and immediately happiness shot through Hervey.

"Filipinas aren't black. They're light brown."

Savagely, "What the hell's the difference?"

The happy mockery in Hervey's eyes expanded. He could have hugged de Lainy in that moment because no trace of his abject misery of last night was present. Now he was all madness. He was, as Cailini would say, all out of character. The gentle Virginian had gone. And Hervey knew, because the two of them were alike in spirit, someone was going to get hurt.

Much later, when all the fury of the battle was past, he would realize Hervey's move, and he would ruefully grin, at himself and with Hervey.

Meanwhile, Hervy, as only he was able, allowed the mockery in his eyes to bubble, to scathe, and with his tongue lashed him to new fury.

"What's the matter with you?" he jeered. "Are you afraid your precious kin—First Family Virginian—will hear (Oh, horror of horrors!) cousin Jefferson laid a colored woman?"

They advanced the length of two houses. Running, jumping, assaulting, dodging, de Lainy shouted his orders. And all the way, Hervey laughed. "Jefferson, Jefferson!—what will you do when you die? Do you think that when you go to heaven there will be segregated clouds? Some for whites to squat on, and others for colored? Or do you believe God is a snob too, and will magically make everyone white? How nice that would

be. How awfully convenient. How terribly face-saving for F.F.V."

De Lainy opened his mouth to snarl an answer, when Jowanowitch screamed, "Look!"

They saw Japs, barely ahead of their position, preparing to fire a machine gun. The barrel was pointed at part of the advancing second squad. Leaping forward simultaneously, de Lainy and Hervey ran zigzag toward the enemy position, shouted to divert the enemy attention. As the gun was moved to face them, de Lainy had already thrown a grenade. Prostrate on the sidewalk, under the gun but at an angle of safety, they heard the explosion. They jumped up, scurried toward the opening of the house to check. Hervey, who was faster, reached the entrance first. He kicked open the door and moved in.

The Japs were scattered around the room, dead and bleeding—all but one. Only stunned by the explosion, he raised his weapon and took aim at Hervey. The sergeant, his rifle held against his hip, squeezed the trigger. The Jap grinned feebly as he heard the click of the jammed and locked chamber. His yellow finger was tightening on his own weapon.

In that second, de Lainy appeared. He pushed himself in front of Hervey, and in the same movement fired his revolver. There were two cracks of sound, one from the Jap and one from the American.

Hervey saw blood spurt from the Jap's forehead, and de Lainy collapsed.

Hervey put his arm around the lieutenant's shoulder and heard him say, "He got me."

He bent over him, looking for the wound.

"No sense in looking. I know."

"It can't be that bad."

"Bill—" de Lainy spoke urgently. There was not much time left. "Do something for me, will you?"

Hervey nodded.

"When you get out of this—go and see March for me. Tell her I hope she'll always be glad." He stopped for a minute. "Glad she did what she did."

"Sure. Sure."

The blood began to ooze from his mouth, and gathering, trickled down his chin.

"And Bill—"

"What?"

"About that argument—"

"What about it?"

"You were right. It is unfair—stupid—vicious—"

"Forget about it."

He tried to smile. "I'll find out in a minute about those segregated clouds."

There was a pause as he fought to say the last words. "Bill."

"What?"

"Don't look like that."

"Vossy—" Hervey could hardly hear him.

"Been goddam good knowing you." He took a deep breath. "Be seeing you."

And though he was dead, Hervey answered, "Yeah. Be seeing you."

His lips trembled, and as he bit them, fighting for control, he tasted the salt of his tears.

"Sometimes I think only death is life."

Slowly he managed to stand, a tall and solitary figure of immense confusion. He felt his warm body flush and chill.

The lieutenant was dead. A man was dead. And there were so few men, as few men as grains of justice. The lieutenant was dead. And he had loved him.

In the tomblike quiet of the room, quiet because he did not hear the shattering noise of the battle outside, he bowed his head.

He knew it was all he could do. Bow his head. This was war. You killed. That was the seed you sowed. You got killed. That was the harvest you reaped. And there was nothing you could do about it. Nothing but bow your head—and drink the vinegar of Calvary.

As the days went on Cailini saw that this was the time of the Vendetta. Hervey's terrible compassion had traveled to its final wrath. He had taken all he could take. He had taken all he was going to take. And although Cailini remembered that Hervey had to die, that death was home, that their fraternity was rich enough to allow this, he still turned to Rosinski and in his fright and misery accused, "I told you this would happen! I told you that night before combat!"

Rosinski had wanted to cry out, "But I am not to blame." Instead he tightly shut his mouth.

With each succeeding day, Hervey aged before Cailini's eyes. His face had thinned and now was ashen, scarred lines ran around his mouth and on his brow, his large eyes grew brighter.

The one time he emerged from his black and tight night was during assault. Then he became diabolically savage. To the squad it seemed that he was intent upon winning the war alone

and unaided. He wiped out sniper nests, machine-gun an mortar encampments, always recklessly exposing himself, as i disinterested in either living or dying.

Cailini strove repeatedly and desperately to penetrate th savage blackness, and failed. Not even a plea uttered on behal of the squad moved him. "You'll kill all of us before you'r through." Hervey only stared at him, and Cailini saw from th opaqueness of his eyes, he was insensitive to communicatior

Slowly the enemy was driven out of San Fernando. The Ja fled northwards, to places that sometimes were thickly vege tated jungle, sometimes to the farms and fields of the Philip pine natives.

And still Cailini sought to penetrate the gathering deat around Hervey's ashen lips.

"Listen to me, Bill. It's Cailini. Your buddy. Please, Bil please. For my sake, for the squad, for Norah, listen for us i you won't listen for yourself." Cailini despaired before th gaunt face and unseeing eyes. "You're dying. Bill. Dying o your feet. Oh, buddy, you're too big for suicide." He shoo Hervey, and now, his voice broken, sobbing like a child, Cailir begged, "Listen. I know I advised you wrong in the past. Tha time about the knife in the Jap's belly. That time about Zool You were right. I was wrong. But not now. Now I'm right. Ba as things are, they'll change. They will, they will. So live, Bil Come out of this thing. Remember Norah, Bill. Norah. Norah Don't you hear? Norah."

Finally Hervey had turned. His eyes, though still feverish were no longer opaque. He had said, "Go away. Leave m alone."

Hope surged through Cailini. He tugged on Hervey's arm "Bill—you did hear, you did!"

Hervey raised his fist and knocked Cailini's hand away. H shouted, "Goddam you, get back to your position." Then h had sneered, "Go on, go and write your stupid book."

After San Fernando they advanced to a point north of th town and swung left to "mop up" a peninsula. It was a sma finger of land that stretched westwards, bounded on either sid by the China Sea.

Part of the enemy had been sidetracked there, had dug in and were throwing fire east into the main American sector. Be cause the enemy within the pocket, small as they were, wer seriously impairing the big push north, HQ issued orders tha they be annihilated.

But it seemed that the Jap position was impregnable, for re peatedly the Americans were repulsed, and each time they re

treated fewer returned. The land was strewn with dead and bleeding bodies.

The position of the first squad was the only advantageous one. Their luck had been unparalleled. Because they were on the left flank and enjoyed what meager protection the terrain offered, it had been their duty to raise the umbrella of fire. This was to have forced the Japs down and rendered them impotent until the other platoons, crawling under the umbrella, advanced within striking distance. But the maneuver had failed.

No one knew what to do. Mennen was dead. The lieutenants were dead. Most of the company were dead. What remained was the first squad of the 1st Platoon, and the wounded and the cowering and the dying.

The walkie-talkie commanded, "Attack!"

The squad looked helplessly at each other, said, "Attack? What with?"

And the walkie-talkie answered, "With what you have left."

Then everyone looked significantly at everyone else.

What to do?

That was the question.

The other platoons had attacked, and look at them now! Dead and dying and wounded. "Annihilate," HQ had said. Instead they had been annihilated.

What to do?

To obey, or to disobey?

Obey, and in a wild, desperate gamble, attempt to accomplish with the puny violence of a squad what an almost full company and its formidable might had failed to do?

Or disobey? Smash the walkie-talkie, render dumb the chanting voice of HQ so parrot-like repeating, "Attack! Attack! Attack!"

Sure, do that and stay put. Then, when questioned later, cook up some tall story. It had been done before, and could easily be done again. No one would squeal. It was their lives, the only lives they'd ever have.

But wait! What of the main sector into which these Japs are pouring high trajectory fire? If we live, they will die. And there are many more of them than there are of us.

Quiet, conscience! Oh, if you were only tangible and I could knock you quiet!

What to do?

To live or to die?

Well, there was nothing to do, not you yourself. The one thing you could do was to thank the Lord you weren't the

squad leader, that the decision of what to do with ten souls plus your own was not your decision.

What would Hervey do?"

It was up to him.

What *would* he do?

The whole squad awaited apprehensively. They looked over to where he lay, now so grim, so cold, planning and rejecting, quite aware he held their fate in the middle of his big and calloused hand.

They stared at him, knowing that he was now God.

And what would Almighty Hervey do?

Cailini felt his heart go out to Hervey, for this was the hour when Christ moved in for the Vendetta's kill. This was compassion's courage, the last installment on soul—man's chosen suicide. It was the hour of combustion, for love was again to work its miracle of destruction; Hervey would become his own burning sword. Like all compassion, his wings would be tongues of fire. Now the earth would foreclose on its dust. What was left would cast no shadow.

Looking at Hervey, Cailini saw Christ, swinging the crucifix club of smoke.

Then Cailini knew, he too was going to die. There was no decision. There never had been. The mortar and machine-gun encampment had to be taken. The war was almost over.

He raised his eyes and looked over the land. The barest shadow of sadness touched him. He would never write that book now. Slowly he felt his body grow warm. He felt as though he were flying through realms of happiness—knowing that to whatever shores of the sun he walked, it would be with Hervey.

A smile settled around his mouth. And when he looked up and saw that the angle of the enemy's fire was changed, now aimed at the squad, and the first mortar—that devil's manna—coming at him, he still smiled.

He counted the seconds remaining to earth.

The squad winced as the explosion roared. Rosinski, who was between Hervey and the spot where the shell had landed, saw what had happened, but he did not dare tell Hervey that Cailini was gone.

The sergeant edged back that he too might see.

And then it happened.

The squad forgot the battle and the decision as they watched Hervey.

They saw him grab a pouch of grenades. Extracting one, he leapt up and forward. Instantly a frenzied staccato of machine-gun fire opened up. His body received a dozen shells that spun him around, yet still, somehow, miraculously, he kept moving forward. With his teeth he pulled the pin from the grenade, then dropped it back into the full pouch.

Rosinski thought he heard him shout, but he was not sure, because there was a tremendous racket of sound. Yet it did sound like Hervey's voice.

"Wait for me, Bob. Wait for me."

As he reached the Jap encampment there was a terrific explosion. For a split second color cut at the sky. Then there was abrupt, startling silence. Rosinski saw that the encampment had disappeared—and so had Hervey. Fascinated, the squad stood, saw the pieces of torn, bloody flesh drop to earth, saw them sucked slowly into the juicy mud. And the mud, as mud will always do, closed over what it had received. Nothing was left. Not even a ripple.

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RALPH LEVERIDGE was born in 1922 and served with the Merchant Marine, the Royal Canadian Air Force and the U.S. Army in the Pacific during the war. *Walk On The Water*, his first novel, was originally published by Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc.

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